



**Spoiled**

**AcidPlacebo**

## Spoiled by AcidPlacebo

**Category:** IT (2017), IT - Stephen King

**Genre:** Blood, Child Death, Dubious Consent, Emotional Manipulation, Emotional/Psychological Abuse, Extremely Dubious Consent, F/M, Fluff and Smut, I'm Going to Hell, Mind Games, Moral Dilemmas, Nightmares, On Hiatus, Other, Other Additional Tags to Be Added, Psychological Torture, Rape/Non-con Elements, Seriously - hang in there, Slow Build, Torture, Violence, What Have I Done, Worth It, really slow build

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Original Characters, Pennywise (IT), Reader

**Relationships:** Pennywise (IT)/Reader

**Status:** In-Progress

**Published:** 2017-10-24

**Updated:** 2017-11-06

**Packaged:** 2020-02-01 00:38:36

**Rating:** Explicit

**Warnings:** Graphic Depictions Of Violence

**Chapters:** 14

**Words:** 22,829

**Publisher:** archiveofourown.org

**Summary:**

You left Scotland to leave a ghost behind, only to find a monster in Derry. But something goes wrong, disturbingly wrong in the plans of the clown, but is it a curse or a blessing? Remember: You have two choices. What will you decide?

# 1. Nightmares

## Author's Note:

Hiya, Reader. So, apparently this happened. This is a first for me, at least with this fandom and language, so I'm not really sure what to say. If you want to take this ride with me: Buckle up, this is gonna be a bumpy one! And a little warning: This is a really (!!!) slow build, but I promise, I'll make it worth the wait!

+ + + This chapter is dedicated to phidari - Thank you so much for the Invite! + + +

You smell soil and salt. The weight of Jack Wade, who has you pinned down lays heavy on your legs and abdomen. With his hands, big as Shovels, gripped around your throat and the wild, crazy milky blue eyes piercing your own, you begin to think: *This is the end.*

Jack Wade, two words that have haunted you since the dreadful day he began working as a janitor at your workplace. Two words, that appeared in almost every letter, every conversation and every thought of you for the past months. You barely even talked to him when he appeared, just smiled nervously when he came into your office to change the light bulbs one too many times in a row to be normal. His tall statue of an aged Bodybuilder, those giant hands, the strawberry-blond stubbly hair growing at the side of his block head and his yellow teeth from smoking cigarillos - he wasn't conventionally scary to you, just a bit off-putting.

It got scary when you found him in your basement, hunched over your freshly washed underwear, in the middle of the night. It got even more scary when he appeared at a cafe where you met up with a co-worker and yelled at the top of his lungs about betrayal, calling you a bitch, a whore. You saw the love letter sprayed onto your locker at work, and the calls on your mobile that seemed to never end. Sure, you told the police every time, your friends supporting and helping you, at least at the first encounters, your employer being understanding of your situation and who, after a few incidents, first warned Jack Wade, then fired him, and after a long time of trouble,

the court tried to protect you by granting a restraining order, but it didn't stop him. Nothing did. He just got more careful, more passive, though sure as hell not less aggressive.

He appeared in your shadows, never talking or waving, just staring - staring you down like a madman, always hiding in dark corners. You told the officers, but their „hands were tied“ to do any more than what has already been done, since you were never fast enough to get witnesses for his presence, and even if you did, he didn't do more than stare from a distance. His almost glowing, milky-blue stare, full of false accusations was almost more disruptive than anything he's done before. It became your personal ghost, omnipresent and oppressive, as if it wanted to knock you out right on the spot, to fire bullets through you, to pin you down. Just as he does now.

You were an easy prey today. You were careless. It was too perfect for him.

You met up with friends, who got fed up with the paranoia. They never said it, but you saw the rolling eyes behind your back, you heard the tiny sighs in your conversations and even though they upset you for not believing, not taking it seriously, you didn't want to lose the small group of people that made you feel somewhat safe. So you went to Suzie for brunch, lovable Suzie, the only girl in the group that really cared, and for once in months, you felt normal again, talking and laughing with your girlfriends, drinking tea and not worrying for a change. But Suzie's stomach got upset, leaving her vomiting in an instant, and even though your worry and foreshadowing conscience came back, you were the one who stayed back to nurse her. The others went, one by one with an excuse so they didn't have to clean up what they would call a „disgusting mess“ behind Suzie's back, and after you put Suzie into new clothes, made her herbal tea and put her in bed, she assured you she would be fine, and you headed home. Since the others took the car, you had two choices: Walk the 30-something minutes walk or ring up a cab and wait. You almost called for the cab, but humming whispers of your friends surrounded your head, growing louder and louder.

*„You DO make too big a deal out of this.“*

*„You can't act like a scared doe forever.“*

*„He can't do anything, the police will have him by the balls if he even tries, so coME ON, DON'T BE SO...”*

You shook your head. *It's just a 30 minute walk anyway, you thought, along the high road, with a beautiful scenery of the Scottish sea. A cab would be a waste of money, I'll be okay.* Suzie gave you a worried look, but didn't say anything as you left her house, relieved to have some peace and quiet.

You can smell it, the salty water beneath you, crushing against cold, gray stone.

He watched you, as he always did - always does - and took the chance you gave him. You barely heard his heavy trampling feet behind you before he grabbed you, putting one hand on your mouth to mute your surprised scream, the other hand grabbing your arm, twisting it to your back, as he dragged you out of sight of the road behind a small bushy area.

He threw you, hard, onto the ground, the edge of the cliff right behind you, and as you tried to sort your thoughts to come up with a plan, he jumped onto you, pressing your legs into the ground with his own, his weight acting like an anvil. His olive trench coat spotted with mud and residue of grass blended perfectly into the surroundings, acting as a cloak of invisibility, even if someone would drive by. You didn't have a chance to say anything, as he wrapped his fingers around your throat, slowly, enjoyingly pushing them into your skin.

His eyes are wild, little bits of foam starting to form at the edges of his lips as he hisses at you in a rough, high voice.

*„...Told you... you didn't see me... you shoulda... shoulda loved me. I do, darling, I do, but you.. you...”*

His grip gets harder.

*„...you thought, you could do better than me, right? 'Saw you, cunt,”* he spits this word on me like saliva, disgusted and furious, *„on the street, laughing with these dressed up guys from your office, as if you*

didn't... know. BUT YOU DO! YOU WILL!“

You feel your lungs slowly collapsing, your breath gets faster and vocal through your wide opened mouth, it sounds like damaged bellows. Your hands, frantically moving like spiders, are searching for a place to grip and pull his hands off, but they get heavier and heavier. The more air you lose, the more weights are added on your limbs, turning them almost numb and hard. Your scratching fingernails don't bother him. He just stares and pushes, pushes the oxygen out of your body. Everything starts to feel heavy, and his face gets blurry as your eyes start to water from pain and panic. You are pushing something down that wants to rise, something dangerous, blazing in your stomach. He says something like „...down with me“, you don't know anymore, because it sounds muffled, like your head is wrapped into a thick blanket. Swirling down a spiral of what may be - in a good scenario - merciful unconsciousness, in a bad one clear-minded paralysis, you try to calm yourself, to be rational...

*This is it.*

At least, he may get arrested now, put into jail... IF they find you. If.

Your hands feel too heavy now, they start to sink into the ground as you hear your heartbeat like frantic drums, louder and louder inside your very head.

*This is the end*, you know it, you feel your energy spilling onto the ground like blood from a wound, Jack Wade is going to kill you, here and now in the dirty bushy patch at the side of the road.

He is smiling now, isn't he? A red smiling mouth in a pale white, distorted face. And then...

Your body reacts before your mind can even comprehend. He is repositioning himself to get a firmer grip, to finish what he began, laughing a high chuckling laugh that doesn't suit him, but doing that

he left one of your legs uncovered. You don't realize what you are doing – neither is he - your primal instincts or whatever it was are taking over, as you pull up your knee, place your foot on the middle of his chest while you grab his shoulders and with the last strain of energy left in your body, scream the scream of a desperate dying person and push him over yourself. Jack Wade's eyes are wide, but it's not fury anymore, not even surprise reflected in them, but fear as he is flying over you, floating, and then falling down, over the cliff into the abyss.

As your chest contracts, your lungs desperately filling themselves with air, you lie on your back staring into the gray sky. Your mind is blank, not able to get a hold of a starting thought. Your body is shaking uncontrollably, your muscles releasing the anxiety and the stress. Your vision becomes a little clearer, so does your hearing, with every breath you take edges get sharper, sounds grow vivid. You hear the waves crushing on the cliff side behind you. When you feel your arms again, you're pushing yourself onto your hands and knees, still panting - your lungs still commanding to compensate for the last minutes of fighting - and stare at the green, wet grass where you lay moments ago. In the corner of your eyes you see the edge of the cliff, and a still racing heart urges you to move towards it. Mind still empty in shock, body aching, you crawl to it, pushing your head over it, to see. To see if he is hiding, waiting again, lurking to jump out again. But all you see is brown and gray, sharp stone, and icy blue water, foaming on the tips of the waves as they crush and hit the rocks. A thought comes by, this time your head is clear enough to hold onto it long enough to acknowledge what it says, and even though it's familiar, it's not comforting at all.

*Two choices.*

## 2. Roots

### Notes for the Chapter:

Since chapter one was to set the scenery, it's only fair to give you something more!  
Enjoy!

Your bed creaks as you almost jump out of it. Your hands feel the moisture of your shirt, your hair and your sheets. It happened again. Your therapist said, it would cease, but it doesn't. It's returning, every night the memory of it comes back to life to hunt you down, it even seems to expand, creating things that weren't there before, like the high-pitched chuckle you heard. You hoped the fractures of this day could be left in Scotland when the move to Derry was set. You couldn't stay, too much had happened. Everything was a walking, talking, breathing or growing remembrance of the past year, your friends more of a burden than a relief. They were worried, even sorry, Suzie especially, but it was as if something had cut the last ties of your ship on troubled water, and you drifted dangerously far into open sea. Derry, Maine, was the only choice for you since it was the hometown of your Grandparents, and with no safe haven in Scotland, Derry was like an anchor of sanity, a relation to something, something you could be sure of. You didn't dare to trust anything, but you trusted in Derry.

You quickly stand up, rushing downstairs to the bathroom to get the sticky wetness and the remains of the nightmare with it off of you. A ray of dim sunlight brushes your face, you can feel the warmth of it on your cheek as you wash your face and stop to examine yourself in the mirror. Your hair is messed up in a hurried bun, your eyes puffy and a little red, as if you have been crying... well, you may have in your sleep anyway. Nothing about you would give away your past, there are no scars or bruises, but you begin to wonder if your stone-cold face, the only aftermath, will be smiling ever again. Your lips just don't seem to be able to remember how to do it anymore.

There is not much that you know about Derry. Your grandparents



moved away from here about 50 or 60 years ago, after a heavy storm destroyed their house and most of the factory your granddad worked at the time. Your grandma's family had a farm and an ancient list of ancestors in Scotland, so they emigrated. That's it, and since your parents died when you were a baby and your grandparents were the only family you had, you didn't care that Derry was unknown terrain. It was enough to keep you going.

After cleaning and dressing yourself, you begin to continue unpacking the last boxes standing in your bedroom. Your House is a tiny one, the smallest in the street, maybe in the whole area. It was unbelievably cheap. One bedroom that you would use as a home workspace since you can't bring yourself into an office with a lot of people anymore, a bathroom just big enough for the bare essentials but with a cute round window made of colored glass-mosaic, a small but light living room with an open kitchen and a simple pantry. But there's one thing that sold it to you immediately: The room under the roof. A beautiful, rustic looking spiral staircase in the corner of the living room led to the attic, which was renewed and built up to be one big space you used as your bedroom. On each side of the slopes were big windows to let light and sunshine into the room, and if you wanted to, they could be covered automatically to shut the outside world off. You painted the wooden walls white, brightening the room, and also replaced the worn out, deep red carpet to be a fluffy soft pale-yellow one. Your bed was brand new, one of the luxuries the cheap move allowed you to have, a Queen sized canopy bed with double mattresses for extra comfort, cream curtains neatly draped around and above it, with embedded orange, white and yellow lights that kind of looked like fireflies when night came to swallow the day. It seemed to you like a shelter, its silent warmth like a welcome friend, wrapping your freezing heart and mind up like a blanket.

The first three boxes you open are just clothes, and you quickly put the few sweaters in it away into the built-in wall dresser. Autumn was merciful in Derry, red, yellow, green and brown leaves fell from the trees but the sun was warm, sometimes even hot enough to let one wear dresses or tank tops. You also found your precious oversized forest-green cardigan with the tacky golden pin of a carousel horse, and you quickly put it on to feel the fuzziness of the cashmere on your bare arms. Your bedroom never seemed to heat up

well, so you always felt a little chilly without a jacket.

Next came books, two boxes full of your favorites – you left a lot of them behind and only took the most worthy ones. You grabbed the last one and looked absent-mindedly at the title – it was „The Transformation“ by Kafka, the cover old and worn out by the many times your hands have bent it while you read. It was a gift from your grandma before she passed, and you remember the first time she read it to you with her soft, soothing voice. Your friends would've been scared by it, but you always felt sad for poor Gregor, to be turned into a beetle without understanding why, how it ruined his life to the point where he died, isolated and alone. Your granny understood you well, and your excited conversations about the story were only broken off when grandpa noticed the book and took it away almost frantically, telling granny to stop scaring you and herself with demonic stories. He was generally a calm person like granny, though cold when dealing with you, deep creases on his face made him look like a man that lived a thousand lives, but he couldn't stand it when someone talked about unnatural, strange things, falling immediately into a rage until the topic was dropped. It puzzled you, but granny told you not to worry about it, so we were careful to not let him hear us again, and we became very good at it.

A sudden popping sound outside makes your heart kickstart, you get on your feet and hurry to your window to look for its source. There is a flower of red balloons in front of your window, blocking your sight. Puzzled, you open the window, a faint smell of sugar - like caramelized toffee – is hanging in the air. Or are you imagining that? You reach out to the balloons to push them to the side, but before you can touch them they move away from your fingertips on their own, revealing the source of the noise you've heard.

Luke Timbers is the neighbors kid, 7 years old with a toothy smile and a head full of weed-like brownish hair. He grins at you from your patch of what the Real Estate Agency called garden, his hand clenched to strings with red balloons on their ends.

„Sorry Miss! My parents said I should say hello, but one of these“ he pointed to the balloons, “got away so i forgot to knock... but I popped

instead!“ , he joked, grinning mischievously.

You remember a week ago, on your first day in Derry, you saw him playing with a stray cat on the streets when Mrs. Timbers came over to welcome you with a little plate filled with mini muffins, and even though you couldn't bring yourself to smile, you thanked her for the food and introduced yourself in-between packing and moving furniture. She seemed nice, a little submissive maybe, as she enthusiastically told you about her family, especially her son.

Relieved by the banality of the shock you thank him for coming over and are about to close the window again when he says „My mom told me to invite you to the fair this weekend! That's the reason I brought these! We thought maybe you haven't heard, since you don't go out much.“ He looked at the balloons with glowing icy-blue eyes, a little yearningly.

„You can keep 'em if you want them. I don't have a lot of space in here anyway.“, you tell him, your face softens a bit, but it's still missing a smile, „And I'll think about coming, okay? Tell your mom I think about it.“ Luke pouts his lips a bit, eyes locked in yours. „Promise me you come, okay? My teacher Mr. Pucker is supposed to be at the dunk tank, and I hate him, but I'm bad at throwing and Mommy and Daddy said they won't help me sink him so I need your help, okay?! You'll help me, right? I'll pay you in popcorn! They are my favorite, I'll get enough for three if I nag them enough!“ he bubbles excitedly. You give up, this kid is more than cute, almost eerily captivating. „Alright, you pip, I'll come... we'll sink the sucker.“

His face gleams with joy, he laughs, repeats „We'll sink the sucker!“ in a singsong voice over and over as he waves you goodbye before running out and about, leaving you behind with a mixture of amusement and guilt for the nickname you gave the poor unknown teacher, and the red bubbly flower is chasing behind him, floating strangely stiff on its strings.

### 3. Judgment

#### Notes for the Chapter:

Last chapter of beating around the bush (badumm-tss) - sorry for taking so long, guys, but endure the suspense, because the gears get going now!

Derry isn't a big town. Here, everybody seems to know each other, a strange familiarity seems to bind the people together, that prevents others from peeking too far into the other one's life but is just near enough to keep the mouths of the town's women talking. You haven't told anyone about what happened in Scotland, and you definitely didn't intend to do in the first place. This was going to be a new chapter of your life, you won't let something ruin it before it even started. Maybe you were too cautious in your first encounters with the locals, because the news of a new, young, single („My, my “) stone-faced woman have spread rapidly, and wherever you go around town, the air gets infused with curiosity, interest and also prejudices.

It was something that becomes obvious now as you go to Derry's shopping center the first time to buy some goods to stock your pantry. As you grab a few cans of preserved peaches, you notice two old women from your neighborhood, talking in hushed voices, surely about **you** as they watch you out of the corners of their eyes. One looks like a picture-book grandma, gray, tiny and a little hunched, with permed short hair, earthy-colored, big clothes and a delightful face, the other one is more of the youth-seeking kind, thin-plugged eyebrows and purple shimmering hair, tall and boney looking in her black-and-purple ensemble. The humming of their whispers doesn't sound like they're trash-talking, so instead of turning away to ignore them, you put the last can of peaches in your cart and pushed it, slightly challenging – either them, or yourself, you don't know - towards them. They stop talking, nervously looking at each other.

„Good morning. “, you say while passing them with a nod of your head, trying to sound as nice as you can, your face smile-less but soft enough that a relieved expression begins to grow on their faces, satisfied that I was friendly and apparently polite. One of them stopped my cart by lightly laying her hand on the side of my cart.

With a cute grandma-smirk she replies „Good morning to you too, Honey, and welcome to town. You're the new girl from Neibolt Street, right? “I nod again. „Are you accustoming well here? You look like a city girl, isn't Derry too boring for you? “

She watches you curiously with young eyes, the other woman raises her painted eyebrows in expectancy of your answer. They rose at the term ‘city girl’, and you could've laughed about it because this was truly ridiculous term to describe you. So, the simple people of Derry thought a skinny-legged blue-jeans, brown Chelsea-boots, a white tank top and a forest-green cashmere cardigan with a tacky pin is „city-girl style “, not to mention your messy bun and chipped cream nail polish. „Maybe I've gotten too grown-up for a big city. I wanted a change and Derry is a pleasurable, quiet one. “. My answer stuns them for a moment, then they break into laughter, and after telling me how charming they thought that was, the picture-book grandma lifted her hand from my cart. „Have a good day, darling, and one thing from an old hag like me: Make those lips smile once in a while. It could be an opener of doors, especially in this town. “

While paying your groceries and putting them in your car you begin to wonder why everyone seems to be so interested in your smile. You've always been told you had a resting bitch face, but what seems like forever ago you made up for it by smiling, laughing and giggling as much as you could. But you didn't do it for anyone but yourself. But now for the first time you feel the pressure, the expectation of other people to smile, but why? To make them feel comfortable around you? To maybe invite them? Right now, you don't want to smile, you don't want the attention of others, no thank you, little cute grandma. Let them call you stone-faced girl all they want. You push the back door of your car down hard, drained from the rising feeling of normality. You will decide for yourself when the moment is right to smile. Or to do anything you want to do. Almost anything...

Your hand is right on the driver's door when a sudden shudder runs down your spine. An ancient feeling rises like a high tide into your head, and with a gasp you look up. On the side of the parking lot, where bushes are, you see...

...*nothing*? You slowly touch your neck, deeply disturbed. You could swear you saw a red-haired figure disappearing in the bushes just a

few meters away from you. You tighten your fingers around your car keys, realizing that your knuckles turned white. Waves of panic crush the inside of your stomach, until you finally breathe slow and controlled, and take one slow step after another, heading to the green balls of leaves. Inside your head, your therapists voice is echoing together with your own: „If you believe you see him, remember: This is JUST a dream, and you WILL wake up. “This ritual, as abstract - yes, absurd even - as it was, helped you through panic attacks and wild imaginations before. *This is a dream, and if I'll look behind these bushes, I WILL wake up*, you're assuring yourself under your breath. Two steps away from the plants, you hesitate, your heart pounding your chest, and with a deep intense inhale you run behind them.

Nothing.

You breathe out, concentrating on the filling lungs inside you. You woke up. This is reality, once again. Nothing is here except for leaves, a little yellowed grass and a few pieces of trash. You turn, walk to your car with feathery steps and get the car engine going, confidently ignoring the perplexed looks of the other shoppers in the parking lot as you speed up, and unknowingly the two glowing eyes hiding in the bushes with them.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Will add the next chapter right now! Thank you so much for reading this and leaving kudos! <3 See you on the next page!

## 4. Encounter

### Notes for the Chapter:

Hope you'll have fun!

Back inside your house, you decide to forget what happened. Just a little setback, this is what it was. A nuisance from the past, but your magic spell worked again, and it gives you a bit of a boost to know that you didn't do something stupid. *And how laughable is it now*, you think, *almost funny*. You put away the groceries, not yet deciding what to eat for dinner, because work is calling you. You get into beast mode on your brand-new laptop (*Thank goodness this place was a bargain*) and start working by emailing your new employer.

The editorial manager of Maine's own publishing company, Joana McKinsley seemed determined to help a fellow Scottish girl rebuilding her life. Tall, curved and brown like a toasted marshmallow, she looked like an amazon waiting for the next fiend to crush when you went applying for the job. She was a rough natured woman, but honest and exited that two things – youth and heritage – bound you together instantly, since she was barely four or five years older than you.

“So, your former work was at a call center agency?”, she asked with open skepticism, but her mouth twitching. “You know we are looking for editors here?”

“I majored in Language and Literature at the University of Aberdeen and had a one-year internship at a local newspaper. “

“The pay isn't that much either.”

“I'm used to living cheap.”

“We don't have a big office.”

“I don't want one. I prefer working at home.”

Joana watched me, one eyebrow raised, before she burst out laughing. It sounded like a lioness.

“You're a one of a kind, girl. I like you!”

She leaned over the table, her hands flat and wide spread on the desk, a fiery look in her eyes.

” Let me tell you, from one lassie to another: I know people, saw maaaaany of them come and go. Most people, even with more skill or experience...” she started to walk around her desk, “... would kill to dive into a company like this, to get an office, to expand connections... except maybe for working moms, which you surely are not. You also need to be connected to your workplace and flexible, available in an instant. So normally, employers would, if they still wanted to hire you, ask you, why you don't want to be here.”

You sat in your chair, your face wiped of any reaction and emotion, locking your eyes to hers. She grinned.

“But I. Don't. Care.”

She pat your shoulder, winking at you.

“Seeing your face, I wouldn't get an answer anyway. Hey, if you do the work right, who the hell cares where you are? We're living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, thank god for the Internet, right?”

The contract she gave you was perfect. Indeed, the pay wasn't great, but it provided enough for you to live without the anxiety to confront yourself with faces of strangers day after day or crippling financial fears. You would start almost immediately, and after a trial period of three months, you would have a safe job deal.

When you left her office, you stood outside of the building on the busy street, the papers in your hands, feeling glad and exited for a new start, your second life beginning now. Then you noticed something shiny on the ground. Bending down, you saw that it was a coin. A hot-dog vendor near you noticed too, and gleefully called out to you.

“Hey, hey, Missy, don't miss the chance! > > See a penny, pick it up,



and all day long you'll have good luck! < <”

You heard him, but the moment you turned to him to reply, he was acting as if he didn't see you. That's odd, you thought incidentally, but quickly picked up the penny and turned it between your fingers. The sun reflected its reddish shade, making it sparkle.

While you are working, you sometimes look outside the window for a break. Luke Timbers didn't come over to your garden again. The whole family seemed to be lost, their house a little too empty. Maybe they went out of town a bit? Originally, you didn't intend to keep the promise you made with the kid, something felt out of place with the whole encounter, but you keep reminding yourself that it must have been your imagination. Who were you to break a sealed deal with a kid. You can handle your emotions.

With this thought in mind you shut off the computer, seeing that dusk has set. With a growling stomach you quickly put a bowl of rice pudding together. The vanilla smell grows deliciously prominent, stretching its odor throughout the whole house. Humming, you open a can of your recently purchased canned peaches to go with your dinner, when you hear a bursting sound of glass breaking, coming from the upper bedroom. Confused, you slowly put the halfway opened can down to the counter. Must've been the light bulb from the uplight, you think, reasoning with yourself. It's the logical explanation, you leave this particular light on every day, out of a habit. But the bulb was brand new.

You sigh, take a new bulb out of your pantry and climb the stairs while cursing cheap brands. The attic door grinds softly when you push it open. The room is pitch dark, you forgot that you put down the window covers in the afternoon. With a frustrated grunt, you reach for your mobile, a 'retro' flip phone because you couldn't find a reason to buy a newer one while this is still working, the little display barely lighting you the way. Cautiously, you take one step after the other, looking for shards of busted glass on the carpet around the lamp. There are none. You unplug it and reach up to screw out the

broken bulb, when the room suddenly brightens.

Sharply drawing air through your gritted teeth, the moment of surprise makes you stumble against the wall. The lights of your bed turned on, little orbs of orange, white and yellow that float and hover around your bed. For a moment, reason wants to tell you that everything is okay, that it's just the timer connected to them that turned them on, when your panic remembers: You don't have a timer.

Mesmerized, you stand in a hunch, your body petrified with your hands still resting on the walls for support. *How? ... What...* Before you can answer one of the thousand questions echoing in your ears, your heart aches painfully when you notice two of the yellow lights, in perfect symmetry, moving.

**“Quite a cozy home you have, little Miss Sunshine.”**

The hair on the back of your head stands up, sending cold showers running down from your scalp. The voice you heard coming from the moving lights is soft and amused. From the shadows, where the golden glowing lights - no, eyes – stopped, you could see the silhouette of something massive. The contours are out of focus, but whatever it is, it towers next to your bed, almost touching the roof with its head. As it takes one step towards you, half of a face is illuminated, a caricature of a clown, with white, cracked, pasty makeup covering an inhumanly large face that's smiling down at you, its pointed lips crimson red and shimmering from saliva.

You dare not to move, speak or breathe. Your body is stiff, cold like ice, you feel like you have been frozen to the bone by the voice of that man – was it a man? – flashbacks you wanted to ban rushing through your head in furious speed.

**“Smells nice, too. Vanilla, one of my favorites, too.”**

His smirk grows wider.

“Now, now, some manners.”, the clown chuckles. “Let's say: I am Pennywise,”, he prances towards you, accompanied by an eerie tingle of bells, his movements more predatory than playful, “the dancing clown.”.

He bows lightly, leaning even closer to you now, holding you in place with his eyes, a cheeky, toothless smile on his face and a single raised brow. He wears a stained, vintage-looking suit, the silver silk dulled dirt. His arm swings out as if he wanted you to introduce yourself, too. Cold sweat collects at your lips, the saltiness of it burning in your mouth. Your muscles don't listen to the command your consciousness screams inside your core, to run, to flee, to do something. Your face twitches, but the silence grows overwhelmingly tense, twisting your organs and numbing your vocal chords. The clown pouts, his face just inches away from you as he squats right in front of you, cupping his face with both hands.

“Tsk tsk tsk,”, he says and wiggles a finger before your eyes,” Courtesy is a virtue, ya know, little doll? Ya making it hard for ol' Pennywise.”

He giggles devilishly. It rings in your ears, shaking your guts, and for the first time your body reacts, by whimpering quietly as the fear you know so well tightens its grip on your hot throat. He stops laughing immediately, illuminated from behind by the bed lights he looks like he is burning. His expression changed, in the half-dark you can see that it's not amusement or cheekiness anymore. It's hunger... and something else – annoyance? Your mind is consumed by the rising fear, you are thrown back, back in time, back on the cliffs edge by a monster with red hair and a white face. You see his nostrils flare as he takes a deep inhale, you almost feel nauseous as if he sucks in your personal aura, layer by layer, stripping you. A thick drop of drool falls on your bare foot, burning your skin like acid when dark, primal growl rises in him, his eyes bursting with golden glow as he starts to open his lips.

> > **CRASH** < <

You jerk by the sudden noise, for a moment you forget everything that is happening, your head snapping down to the ground. As you realize that you turned away from awaiting death, you snap it back again with wide eyes just to find yourself alone in your room. The clown was gone, no sign of an unwanted intruder left in the dim light.

There is a knock on the door, and for a moment you aren't sure what to do. Tears want to flood your eyes, but you swallow them hard, now shaking all over. With timid steps, you go downstairs, yelling "Coming!" with a cracked, hoarse voice. With your hand on the doorknob, you breathe heavily, whisper "I'll wake up." and open.

There's a stern looking man with teenager in front of your door, the teen boy apologizing with a frustrated expression on his face for breaking your living room window with his football. The man, who must be his father, has his arms crossed, glaring at him. "Sorry for the mess, Miss. He shouldn't even be outside at this time of the day, it's past the curfew. **Way** past the curfew, indeed.", he hisses at his son. After he gives you his card promising to repay you for the window, you look after the pair, hearing the father scolding his son until you couldn't see them anymore. You don't know how long you stand there in the open door, the business card of the man resting useless in your hand, staring into the darkness.

*This is reality, right?* You felt so sure before, but what happened – was it real, too? How could it be? In which reality does a clown appear in your bedroom late at night, inhumanly and uninvited, and disappear again without a trace? A warm autumn breeze flies by and brushes your skin. You feel it on your face, arms, chest, but there is one cold feeling right on your foot. You look down to see a shining, wet spot on your skin right next to your ankle, consuming the heat of the wind completely.

**Notes for the Chapter:**

Action is finally starting, so no more clowning around (sorry, I'm feeling punny today), thank you for staying with me! Next chapters will be up soon!

## 5. Fair

Morning comes hard onto you. You sit on your little couch in the living room, the spot you didn't leave the whole night. Your magical bedroom wasn't a safe haven anymore, and you didn't dare to go back yet to maybe find the clown again, waiting for you.

All night you have been wide awake, debating with yourself in your head, about what happened or what you imagined happening. Those were the two choices you had Reality or Imagination, but the deciding between them has become almost impossible...

For what seems the hundreds time, irrationality and reason repeat the same conversation again.

*I saw a clown in my bedroom last night.*

*How would a clown get into my house unnoticed?*

*His eyes were yellow, glowing in the dark.*

*That's impossible, eyes don't glow.*

*He said his name was Pennywise.*

*My tired head must've imagined it because of the memory of the hot dog vendor.*

*The saliva on my foot wasn't an imagination.*

*That could've been possibly any liquid, maybe even my own.*

*I felt the same things from my nightmares, I felt this...*

*NO, this was just a dream, and I DID wake up.*

Yes, you conclude, after an eternity, it WAS a dream, you ARE awake

now. Nothing happened. Just paranoia, just exhaustion. You stop shaking, your decision drawing a little energy into your limbs. You harden your crumbling heart, not willing to give up the steady stand you've built up that's so hard to win, so easy to lose. The coffee machine cuts through the silence that possessed your house, breaking a spell. You enjoy the noise, reminding you that your feet are on the ground, your head sits on your shoulders and you are in control of your emotions. The urge to fill the house with noise is irresistible, with a steaming cup of black coffee in your hand you turn on your record player. You forgot which CD you've put in it, you didn't use it since you moved, the self-made Mix-CD starting with an upbeat and happy sounding song. You close your eyes and take a sizzling sip of the black liquid when the music starts, its beat sounding like a battle cry. This has got to be a sign. You jump up the stairs of your spiral staircase, push the door open with grim determination and rush to the windows, drawing the covers so hard you almost rip them. Bright light fills the room, the smell of sugary vanilla still lingering. The smell makes you angry, you open both windows, allowing the outside air to wash the room clean. You stand in the middle of the room, the music in your ears, singing the lyrics with it while opening every drawer, every door you can find, to rid your sanctuary of every ghostly fear and banish the demons back into the darkness.

The smell is gone, the windows closed again. The bed is freshly made, the room sparkly clean because you spent the whole morning cleaning it like a maniac. Exhausted, the bed feels warm and inviting. You lay on it for a rest, your lids fluttering. You feel safe again, fresh again, so you allow yourself a nap. As you drift into sleep, the music in the living room starts to fade. You wonder dully when you put what sounded like an old-fashioned carnival song on the CD, but when slumber finally catches you in its arms, the thought was long forgotten.

*Your vision is distorted from the lack of air he is pushing out of you. You're back on the grass, back on the cliff. You feel the fingers on your thorax, feel the weight of the perpetrator. But something changed, everything seems different, he is morphing into something tall. You try to focus the blur that fogs your eyes, to identify the attacker. For a second*

*you see him sharply, red hair, blue eyes, but not milky ones – the eyes are different, and if you were able to, you would gasp. They are icy blue, unnaturally saturated and deep like an ocean. It wasn't Jack Wade that strangled you – it was Pennywise.*

*Confused hysteria makes you fight harder, your fingernails scratching over white gloves as the jingles of his bells taunt you. He pushes you deeper in the ground, a silver shimmering plummet, and his grin is a reddish abstract frame containing rows of teeth. The soil is consuming you slowly, but the dream is not turning. He isn't readjusting – because he doesn't need to.*

*“Come down with me, sunshine.”*

*The grip gets tighter and tighter, your head feels like a balloon, ready to pop.*

*“Down there, everything floats.”*

*How much can a neck resist before breaking? Your lungs collapse, you feel them folding and crumbling. This is not the way this usually goes, you're much more aware, this is way worse. You pant loudly, trying to say something to end this dream, a codeword, a jinx.*

*“P...Phhh....”*

*Flashing spots are dancing all around the edges of your vision. Unable to see anything anymore, you just hear him now, his voice soaked with delight.*

*“P-P-P... Please? Gotta' speak up, buttercup!” he joked.*

*Your body struggles, feeling a new, terrifying sensation, a heat starting from your abdomen and burning its way to your limbs into the tips of your toes and fingers. Is this what dying feels like?*

*“P...enny..w..ise.”, you rasp, your eyes trying to look at him directly for the last time on this worldly life. When your eyes find his, you see more than your own reflection in them, and you ask yourself if Pennywise sees it, too.*



You wake up by the sound of your cellphone, your head feeling like a book whose pages were turned too many times, tired, heavy and worn out. Fractures of your dream are still prominent in your head, making you a little dizzy. It was so vivid, like a lucid dream. You find your cell – Joana calls to ask how work is going. Stuttering you tell her you like the work, everything going fine as you hurry weak-legged to your computer, turn it on and promise her to be finished before 6 p.m. It's only 2:30 p.m., so if you speed through, you can make it. Your eyebrows pucker, you feel the pounding in your head is getting heavier, but you just scoff begrudgingly, and start to work.

\*\*\*

A lazy and sleepy coat lies over the Sunday morning. Two days have passed, nothing unnatural has happened again, nothing except your dreams. They are haunted with the clown since the day Joana's call saved you. It seemed to evolve into a twisted version of the original, your mind cruelly trying to tear you apart. It always ends on the very moment where your own face is mirrored in those bright golden eyes.

Today is the day of the fair. The whole city seems to be wrapped up in a coat webbed of fragrances, candied apples, roasted peanuts and maroons, corn dogs, candy floss. Sweet and salty strings of air pull the people of Derry out of their homes and into the city core. This day is perfect for an event like this. Thin, flowery shaped clouds spread over the sky, the sun happily giving away the last rays of it's warm lights to brighten and heat up the city, the breath of air cooling and caressing.

Yesterday you went to the Timbers house with a batch of cinnamon rolls. You made too many as an excuse to talk to Luke, because the sudden realization that you didn't know when and where he and his family would be to meet him came with the queasy feeling about the fair. But they weren't home yesterday, not in the morning, not the afternoon. It worried you, since you haven't seen any of them after Luke came to invite you, but you brushed away the thought of not going. You know where Luke would be, after all. He told you about

the dunk tank.

You stand in the bathroom, brushing your hair. For the first time in a long time you feel like you really want to dress up, enjoy the day like a normal girl would. Your hair falls soft over your shoulder, you could leave it open for a change, but put it in a messy bun again, already feeling the warmth of the day. You put on light makeup, just enough to feel dolled up. In front of your dresser you try to decide what to wear. Finally, you are contempt with the outfit you pick: white, low cut sneakers, electric blue skinny Jeans that are cut a little below the knees, A white, slightly oversized blouse without a collar, small multicolored balloons sprinkled lightly on it – it seemed appropriate for the occasion - and a dark and long burgundy cardigan, in case the sun decides to take a break from its job of beaming. You don't take your cell with you – who would you call anyway? – just some money and your keys, a bag would just be in the way and you like the idea of not having to worry about losing it or getting robbed.

Walking to the fair was a great idea, the streets are full of life, laughter and music from the marching band. The humming buzz is soothing, and you begin the experience by walking around the main street's vendors. Kids are everywhere, stuffing themselves with sugary treats or crying because their parents don't buy them tickets for a fair ride. You treat yourself, buying a glowing, shiny candied apple, it's red shell reflecting the sun. You forgot how nice it was, the tartness from the green apple, stinging your tongue, embracing the sweetness of the sweet sensation of sugar coating on the roof of your mouth. *Sweet-and-sour-delight, perfect combination.* You choke a bit when you see a clown, but this turns out to be just a harmless man in a cheap, colorful outfit and a signal-red wig. He smiles at you, rubbing his stomach with an exaggerated, jolly expression and winks, a secret question: "Doesn't it taste good?" Then he gently waves at the kids surrounding him, handing out balloon animals, bopping noses and flirting with the moms and even dads around him, making them laugh. The difference between them is so peculiar, you recognize, there's nothing odd about him, no hint of the inhuman, devilish aura of the dream-clown you keep seeing each night. *You are so ridiculous,* you grumble to yourself, and start asking your way to the dunk tank.

It's utter madness in front of the booth, apparently the whole elementary and middle school gathered at the charity-devoted dunk-tank of the Derry Schools to dump their teachers into a pool of ice-cold water - *A once-in-a-lifetime chance to humiliate them without fearing detention*, you think while you keep a watch-out for Luke. On the tank seat sits a chubby, blond woman, pretending to enjoy the fun while looking at the faces of mischievous excitement from her students. Two options cross your mind: Mr. Pucker, Luke's teacher hasn't been on the line yet or you're too late, because Luke isn't anywhere to be seen. You scan the masses once again, but no weed-haired boy in sight. Finally, you fight your way to the preparation area behind the booth, tipping on the shoulder of a balding, stick-like man with glasses.

"Excuse me, do you know a boy named Luke Timbers?"

The man turns to you, shock and worry in his expression.

"L... Luke Timbers, you say? I knew him, I was his teacher, but..."

Irritated by the past term "knew" and "was", you explain who you are, and how you agreed to meet Luke here, when a pitiful expression appears in his face.

"Miss, sorry to tell you, but you haven't... umm, you don't know...? He... he's gone missing for almost over a week."

You stare at him, confused.

"But I saw him just a few days ago, he stood in my garden and invited me here."

"Are you sure it was Luke? If you really saw him, maybe you should tell the police, his parents are searching all around for him, even in the neighboring cities."

"Maybe I've mistaken..."

The chubby woman from the tank seat storms your way, dripping wet and clearly annoyed. "Pucker, your turn... have fun. They look like they are ready to kill...", she says as she rubs her ear with a pink towel she carries. Mr. Pucker looks at you apologetically, smiling a

nervous half-smile and shrugs his shoulders as he walks away, leaving you with utter confusion and a very bad feeling.

You wait the whole afternoon and into the evening, sitting in a nearby cafe, for Luke to show up, not believing what you heard. You didn't mistake him when he stood in your garden, you knew how he looked like, Mrs. Timbers had shown you pictures of him, a proud mother and her only beloved child, he seemed joyful and carefree, a bit cheeky like any other normal kid when you saw him. Not a bit lost or missing. How could you have seen him when he was missing?

A shade of pinkish red inflames the sky, the fair slowly disintegrated by leaving citizens and sellers dismantling the booths, you notice. You look for a watch, realizing that it's almost 7 p.m. and remember the curfew. So, Luke didn't show. Why? Was he really missing? The annoyed waitress that glared at you for every hour you waited in the cafe smiles sarcastically when you pay your untouched, cold coffee, and you start to walk home. *I'll go to the Timbers house, and ring them*, you think. You have to be sure about what's going on. The sun has disappeared almost completely, dimming the light and tinting everything purple and blue. It gets cold, so you pull your cardigan tighter and fasten your steps, leaving the city core behind you. The streets are eerily quiet. The empty driveways and sidewalks are a strange contrast to the masses of people you've seen through the day, flooding Derry. It looks like everyone lives only by the rules of god and the curfew.

You're passing Copper Street, an abandoned little street that was once what you would call an industrial area, with large storage units on one side and concrete factory terrain, maybe an iron work, on the other side, when you freeze in the spot. On the other end of the street, the distance smudging clear sight, you spot a small figure, running like the devil is behind it, and hear the voice of Luke Timbers, screaming tearfully,

**“PLEASE, SOMEONE, HELP ME!”**

as the figure stumbles, and is swallowed by the blackened ground, disappearing.

One second.

It takes merely one second to think a million thoughts. You don't dare to call someone to help, the urgency preventing you from even thinking about it. This is dangerous, a dangerous situation, for Luke, for you, what should you do? You need to act fast, to control your emotions if you don't want to ruin a life.

You start to run.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Ready people? Clown incoming in 3...2...1...

## 6. Dead-End

### Notes for the Chapter:

Thanks to everyone for reading this. I'm really trying, and seeing the kudos and comments just keep me going!

You almost fly down the stairs of an underpass. Before you is a swampy area, fenced, a big yellow “Beware” sign hung up on it a long time ago.

Dead-End.

The Underpass it is.

Your feet slip on the wet stairs, making you clinch to the handlebars in the middle of them. You get a hold, racing down the stairs as fast as you can. The underpass is huge and long, tiled from the bottom to the top, pale and moldy yellow tiles wherever you look. Long Plastic-wrapped lights dip the place in a dull, piss-colored stain, graffiti marks of rebelling teenagers are tagged on the walls, token to remember visitors of their past existence. You stop a moment at the bottom of the stairs, frantically listening for a traitorous sound. It's frighteningly silent down here, the only audible noise are the splashes of little drops that fall on the tiles from the puddles and moisture of the swamp above.

“**Luke?**”, you shout, not certain that a loud call in such an ominous place and situation is the best idea.

Nothing but dripping and the almost inaudible crackle of the electric bulbs.

You slowly sneak along the wall, looking focused and heavy-hearted into the tunnel.

“**Luke!**”, you call again, your shaky voice bouncing from tile to tile, repeating the name endlessly. The urge to calm your heartrate makes you breathe through the mouth, attempting to suppress any noise.

The tunnel stretches in front of your vision, so it seems, still denying you an answer.

You hear a quiet crying sound behind you. You spin on your heels, holding a scream as the light next to you flickers and shuts off. About ten feet away from you, there's someone lying on the ground, half hidden and distorted by the shadows the broken light created.

"God damn it, Luke, what are you doing here? What happened?", you ask nervously, reaching out, swallowing on a feeling you don't want to feel. It gets stuck in your throat, suffocating you. It's not Luke Timbers who lifts his head to stare at you, no toothy childish grin but a manic one, imprinted on your mind. The thing rises, growing before your eyes, the limbs enlarging, clothes changing into an olive trench coat and mud-stained jeans. Eyes that are milky blue stare you down, not leaving your face, hair begins to grow out of a pale head, short and strawberry blond. Right before you stands Jack Wade.

Your mind is turning blank again, you fight the numbness that wants to crush your body, you know the feeling so well. Realization hits you like a brick wall – you followed a ghost, a trickery. God knows where the real Luke is, because you didn't even met him once. He had brown eyes, like his mother, who so proudly showed you pictures of him. How could you've forgotten that? But it doesn't matter anymore, now there's just you and Jack Wade, like one year ago, a different time, a different place, but the same people, the same sickening feeling again. Something rebels in you, wanting to break out, but you push it down.

*Control your emotions*, you repeat, filling the white void your head is creating. *Control, this is just a dream. You will wake up.*

Every second it gets harder and harder to breathe, to not go into a frenzy, the silence deafening your senses.

Jack Wade slowly cracks his knuckles, eyes still fixed on yours.

"I came to finish what we started, darling. You'll come down with me."

His voice shook every bit of your good judgment, it was the voice of a dead man. This was off, so off, he was dead, you knew it. Still, you see him, unmistakably him, now walking towards your pent-up body, slowly filling the gap between the both of you, his hands searching for your throat.

*This is a dream, the mental chant continues, I will wake up. Just a dream, I am in control, I will wake up.*

The touch of his fingers on your skin break the spell. This time, it's not a dream. You doubt it ever was. This is reality, it WAS reality since the first time you stepped foot in Derry and your nightmare changed.

Two choices.

This time, your body listens to your inner command, you are turning 180 degrees, bolting, fleeing from him, from what he means, what he releases in you. You run blindly but almost immediately you're hitting something flexible that pushes you back, causing you to stumble and fall on your back. The way is blocked by a wall of red balloons. You jump to your feet, the wet, slow steps of Jack Wade driving you forward, and push. They are hard as rock, not moving an inch, and the absurdity of your position makes you almost laugh out loud. A Dead end, again. Standing there, with your back turned to the noise of the steps, your hands flexed on the red balls of air you anxiously deliberate.

Two choices.

Two choices.

What will you decide?

You dart into Jack Wades direction, his arms and hands trying to catch you swatting through the air. As you try to dodge them you slip and hit the floor hard, sliding over the muddy wet tiles. Your face, hair and clothes are smeared with green and brown slime, your skin bleeding from scratches and cuts but you don't care, struggling to



dash away to the exit. You're able to push forward, running about twenty feet, a spark of hope igniting by the sight of approaching stairs, when you feel the grip of a hand around your foot, making you fall again, this time forward onto your stomach. You intercept the impact with your forearms, protecting your head while a shocked groan gets pressed out of you by the fall. You breathe through the increasing pain on your ribs and look over your shoulder.

It's the clown, that nightmarish figure, scrunched down on all fours like a tiger before the kill, his grip tight around your bare, bleeding ankle. You can feel the frost from his blue eyes transferring to you, stiffening you like a porcelain doll.

"Time to float!" he happily says, with a pointed smile and then his jaw opens at a dead slow pace, revealing rows and rows of long, needle sharp teeth glimmering in the flicker of the lights. He growls, a rattlesnake-like sound emerges him as the color of his eyes shift from ice to fire, gloriously burning in brightest amber. He pulls you back to him on your ankle in a single, forceful motion and bites, the sound of a thousand scalpels slicing through thick air a companion of the strike. You scream like you never did before with a voice you hardly believe is your own, and in a desperate attempt of protection you throw your arm back, your elbow sinking in the mouth of the monster. You are met by unspeakable pain as the teeth pierce your skin. Your throat burns as you scream, your arm feels like it's dipped in acid, digging up your skin layer by layer. Tears are running, bursting out of your eyes with no resistance. You think nothing, you can't do anything but scream and cry and push yourself away from the flaming something that wants to rip you apart to get out, to swallow and devour you.

You feel the teeth suddenly pull back and your echoed cries get mixed up with another sound, a deep rough cry that contains surprise, anger and a faint pain. You feel the blackout coming like a salvation, and as your eyes flutter to Pennywise, you see his toothed jaws pulling in, coughing up your blood and staring at you with bewilderment, before finally, you are embraced by the sweet serenity of nothingness.

## 7. Towers

### Notes for the Chapter:

People, I'm so excited and thrilled to see your comments. This is picking up speed, and I thank everyone that still reads this and enjoys it, it really makes my day! C:

#### IMPOTANT NOTE:

This chapter contains child death and it'll only get worse from here, so if you're triggered by death, gore, abuse etc. please be warned!

*Black and quiet, you feel like you are floating, your body stripped of its weight, light as a feather.*

*"You'll always have two choices, honey, you understand? Two choices. You will decide, one way or the other."*

*A familiar, soft voice speaks in the distance, the wave of sounds barely audible. You remember a feeling of old and gentle fingers brushing over your cheek.*

*"Your decision, that's all that matters."*

*The weights are returning, you feel them anchoring in your head, dragging you deeper and deeper. They expand, pushing at the walls of your head, pulsing as they try to give into the increasing pressure.*

*Two Choices...*

*Two...*

Everywhere pain. Your eyes remain closed, but you are awake now, you know because the pain returned. And what a pain it was - your back as well as your thorax feel sore and shattered, you can feel crusts of dried fluids, surely blood, maybe some tears, snot and saliva mixed with it, on your arms, your face, your legs. Cold, stale drafts

help you create a mental map of where your clothes are ripped and wounds are fresh. Every flat breath you take is like a powerful sting, starting in your ribs and quickly spreading down your spine into your pelvis. You are still not ready to open your eyes, afraid of what would appear before them, so you continue to listen and feel to prepare yourself for a view.

There is a dripping sound, every drop is repeating itself, so maybe you are still in the tunnel. Your hands, spread away from your body, feeling the ground tell you otherwise. Your fingertips feel a sharp, rocky, uneven ground, rusted metal and cold plastic and what feels like teared bits of different fabrics. You take a first conscious whiff of air through your nose, gagging immediately, your whole body punishing your foolish movement by numbing agony. You smell decay, a sweet-sour smell of rotten flesh mixed with burned sugar and mold. The composition of odors is overwhelmingly disgusting, making your gastric acid creep up your esophagus.

You can't scan anything else, so you open your eyes, bracing yourself for the worst. You are blinded at first, the eyes squinting and slowly adapting. The first thing that you can see is a round, barred glass-dome. Dark, almost black Stone walls frame it, running down in a similar shape, out of your sight. Out of the corners of your eyes, you notice something moving, slightly turning your head to see what it is. The view makes your heart drop. Limbs, torsos, whole and torn carcasses are floating around you, circulating up to the dome, rising and falling in an obscurely peaceful swirl.

The source of the smell. Corpses of at least 30 people - kids, teens, even adults. You stare at the hovering white remains, processing but not understanding at all. The worst scenario would've been better than this, this was just... unbelievable. Illogical. Unnatural.

You fight with your trembling arms and aching backbones to sit up. A sharp flash of hurt that waters your eyes shoots through your right arm, making you weep unintentionally. *The bite*, you remember, look down your arm and moan pained at the sight of blackened, green-shimmering wounds all over your elbow and the area around it, creeping up to the directions of your wrist as well as your shoulder.

Your bones crack when you finally sit, wobbling and exhausted. You're sitting on something like a compressed platform, containing millions of pieces of ancient trash: Toys, Metal junk, maroon rust covering them, abandoned frameworks, moldy wood, dirty cloth-pieces of ripped Jeans, bags, jackets and plastic residue. It's piled up into a tower, with you on the top, you can see the ground as you bend a bit over the edge of your podium, spotting pipe openings on the walls and some stone pools of dark water in the ground.

“What the...” you whisper, trying to put the puzzle pieces together. A child goes missing in Derry. Visits from a gruesome clown, appearing and disappearing at will. Corpses of people floating around you. You're at the top of a trash pile, too sturdy to be here unplanned. This must be the inside of a tower or well, maybe an underground water basin. But where is the one who dragged you here?

Pennywise, the word sounds like a curse, if you say or mention it too many times, it will appear.

Pennywise, the dancing clown, waltzing through your wake and dreams leaving a trail of confusion and darkness behind him.

Pennywise, who is everything but human.

You flinch as the silence bears a new sound. The continuous dripping is paired with the hollow sound of steps and a stomach-turning dragging noise. Your eyes rush over the edge of the pile again, your functioning arm tightly wrapped around your injured elbow, shaking from both the cold and the unknown approach. In a trance, you see him, emerging from a pipe opening, one of his hands is clenched in a mess of mousy-brown hair of a girl, maybe eleven years old. The girl seemed not dead yet, but barely living either, bleeding heavily from a gap on the side of her torso. The clown giggles, swinging the poor child like a flower basket.

“Aww, silly Lily, you don't wanna play anymore? But we had so much fun together, didn't we?”

You watch in horror how the clown lifts his prey up, his face meeting hers.

“You need to forgive me, you're too darn cute,” he mocks, you see him smiling his demonic smile,

“I'm gonna have to eat. You. Up.”

Your tilted position doesn't allow you to see the face of the girl, just the monsters as he opens his mouth, teeth blooming in his gums like weeds on a field. You know what he is going to do, you don't know why, but it's not important. You can't deal with the foreshadowing, so you curl up into a ball, ignoring the waves of misery your wounds send out. But even your forcefully closed eyes and shaking hands over your ears can't shut out the whimpering cry of the child and the following horrid scrunching sound, a symphony of bones breaking and meat ripping. It drives you almost mad, inevitably you start humming, a hot iron in your mouth and a blank mind forcing you to the brink of insanity. You want it to stop, every echoed chew is a push to the edge. You rock yourself, louder and louder you're humming and shaking your head in denial of what's happening inside you and at the bottom of the pile.

**“It's rude to interrupt dinner time, you know.”**

Your emptied eyes open and meet the blood-smeared face of Pennywise, towering above you in his silver, victorian costume, his face hard and emotionless. His voice is low and cold.

“That's twice, now.”

You're sweating pure adrenaline, he is so intimidatingly tall, radiating an aura of resentment. Your mouth is dry and sore, but with your hands still at the side of your face you manage to whisper hoarsely:

“T...Twice...?”

He nods in grim agreement, his arms crossed over his ruffled chest, the small motion filled with disgust and cold fury.

“You ruined dinner twice, little doll. First,” he held a gloved finger up, his long sharp buckteeth pinching his lower crimson lip, emphasizing on the 't', “You spoil YOUR meat, making ME stop feeding for the first time in centuries.”

You don't understand a word he says, spoiling your meat? How? Why?

“Second,” he continues, holding a second finger up, wiggling them, his face still stern and angry and the never-blinking eyes locked into yours, “You disturb my replacement meal. Poor Lily. Not getting a rest even after she's dead.”

“I... I don't...”, you try to understand, to reason or explain, even though you know it won't help at all. But even so you're cut off by a furious hiss, Pennywise jumps on top of you, crushing you into sharp shards of metal. A normal hand placed between your breasts pushing you down and make you scream as something under you pierces your back, another, clawed hand lingering in front of your eyes, Pennywise's voice sounds like a swarm of angry bees.

“You did. You still do. Your smell of fear is exquisite, like a rare delicacy, my lovely doll, but your meat is inedible, spoiled by something. And I want - to - know - WHY!” With every word his face rocks nearer to yours, scratching your cheeks with his claws, you can see every crack in his makeup and every shade of red of Lily's blood scattered on his face and ruffled costume. He stands up again, releasing you from the stinging ground.

“Make yourself at home, dolly-dear.”. He sounds dangerously calm, a little jollier, this change of tone more threatening than his pure aggression from before. “Your stay here is indefinitely extended. 'Cause Pennywise doesn't like to not-know.”

## 8. Resistance

### Notes for the Chapter:

I'm so excited to see all these wonderful, kind words in the comments! THANK YOU!!!

Let's head into the sewers, folks. This isn't over in a long shot! C:

Minutes became hours, time a mere word without meaning. He didn't leave his viewing point, right in front of you, not on the pile but on a protruding pipe-hole on the wall. Legs spread over the pipe, his hands in front of him, arms straight, focused glare, you are being watched, investigated. He would have looked funny, sitting there like a cowboy riding an iron tube, if it wasn't for his expression, concentrated, fierce. At first, you didn't dare to move, you just breathed, existed merely. Even the tiny flares of your nostrils could be one move too much.

His gaze was like the sword of Damocles hanging over you that could sweep down to cut your head off any second. You used the endless silence to think, and you thought many things. You imagined a few scenarios on how to escape, all of them terribly failing. You thought about your house and how it'll look abandoned tonight, drained from its feeling of lovable comfort, a ghost ship harboring in the street. You thought about Luke for a while, but you were brutally disillusioned when you recognized half a boy with weed-like hair, brown eyes shaded with white fog, floating past you. The thought that this boy, the boy you knew but never met, was here with you, inches away, but gone forever still, overwhelmed you with terrible sadness. All while the killer of him was on the other side, preying on you.

But thinking got heavier, you noticed it a while ago. Your head is pounding again, the same way it pulsed in your dreams and your unconsciousness. You thought about that, too, and came up with a pretty reasonable explanation for it. Pennywise was reading, flipping through your mind and soul like a picture book, in search for something only he knew what it was. It seemed reasonable, because you started to have fractioned flashbacks, tiny bits of memories long

buried and forgotten in your head. You saw them too: You – alone – on your first day of school, for example, the day of your parent's funeral – you were just a baby at that time – the day Jack Wade changed the lightbulbs in your office, your grandma reading you "The Transformation" as a bedtime story when grandpa was about to snap for the first time. You saw it all, a slideshow, all while feeling the presence of an intruder... It is a painfully throbbing pressure, every page of your inner book turning makes your veins tighten, blood rushing achingly fast and making you dizzy. So, you started to fight the turning, pushing the invisible hand on the pages back. You trained your whole life to push the things you didn't want or weren't allowed to feel back.

The rattling sound that came with the shift of his eye color gave away that he knew you interfered, but he didn't react except for a derisive grin that appeared on his face. It turned into a power play between you and the clown.

But he had stamina. He kept forcing himself onto your mind, you kept fighting to hold him back, because you came to a conclusion: Since your body couldn't stand a chance against this being, maybe your head might.

What seems like a million years later, you feel exhausted and weakened when he props himself up on his viewpoint.

"While this is getting interesting, I must leave you for now, little doll."

The snide smile doesn't cease of his face as he waves.

"Hunger's calling, you know the saying: One cannot think well, *kill* well, sleep well, if one has not dined well. "

And with that said, he disappeared in the pipe, his laughter trailing behind him. His mood change put you out of your apathic state. Out of all he could have said and done – spoofing Virginia Woolf and leaving you unattended would've been on the far end on the list of possibilities. Ideas and concerns are running wild, is this a trick? A



chance? An ambush? Your immobile body resists to follow, but the spark of enthusiasm that ignites in you is powerful enough to keep the muscles going. This is a chance, despite the unlikeliness of success, it's maybe the only one you have. It seems like the cat has left the milk to catch a bird, you better make use of that.

You rush to scan if you're really alone, limping as you walk since your legs refuse to work right. Your hearing is sharp and determined to ensure Pennywise's absence. You're sure you are alone when your head stops hurting all together, so he definitely must be far away, out of reach to grip onto your thoughts. You search for the safest looking side of the Trash tower to climb down, wrapping the remains of your cardigan over the bite wounds on your elbow to shield it from further scratching. It's so easy now to ignore the soreness, easy, as your hysteria motivates you to leave this place as fast as you can. You get on your stomach and swing your legs over the edge, searching for a stable hold. With every caution you allow yourself in your hurry to escape, you begin to climb down the stacked memorials of victims.

But it's going awfully slow, your already sore hands and feet bursting open and losing their grip a few times when something tears and as it drops down to the ground, shattering and creating a noise that could summon the demon back. The power of your muscles decreases, slowly and steadily, you panically realize. You get too reckless as you step on a handlebar of what has been a child's tricycle once. It crackled and broke the second you put your weight on it, your weakened hands not able to compensate. With a shocked "NO!" you lose your grip and fall, down to the abyss, but you come to a halt immediately. For a second you're hanging in the air, as a tight grip around your collar strangles you before something swings you through the air. It all happens so fast, you just see slurs of dark colors, your eyes widen in shock, but what you feel when the world stops moving is a pierce so powerful you see stars glimmer around your vision, framing Pennywise's grimace of triumph. Your left-hand throbs, you can feel that blood spouts out, making a disgusting bubbling sound.

He's got you literally pinned down by your hand with a metal rod, the handlebar that doomed your descent is sticking out of it, fixating you permanently onto the top of the tower again.

“Pride comes before a fall, my dear.”

You whine in pain and humiliation as he cups his hand softly under your turning, stretched jaw, making you face him and his delighted laughter.

“Remember that next time.”

You can't stop sobbing. He disappeared again, probably for good this time, but you couldn't care less. Your pinned hand hurts so much, you would gnaw it off if you would have the mental energy left to overcome the brain mechanism protecting you from doing it.

Every move of your hand electrocutes your arm with spasms and agony. You try and try again to bring yourself to pull the handlebar out, always stopping right before you would wrap your fingers around it. You can't stand the thought of the impact it would have. Heavy hiccups make you shiver, but it's not just the agonizing pain of your hand that fuels your tears. He tricked you, making you feel safe enough to crush you, laughing at your useless hopeful attempt of getting away – and you were dumb enough to play right into his hands.

After he left, you quickly searched and found an old belt and a rope. You've put the rope around your arm and tightened it using your undamaged hand and your teeth to stop the pouring blood flowing out of you, which it did after a while. The belt is pressed between your teeth, intended to prevent you from shattering them as you pull the rod out, but it hangs unused in your mouth, dripping with your drool and residue of your hot breath. Two choices. Leaving it in or pulling it out.

Finally, you bring yourself to rip it out, the belt muting most of the screams that slip your mouth. You press the burgundy fabric of your former cardigan onto the gaping hole, wrapping it tightly and spit out the belt. There's still blood drawing from the wound, but it slows down and after a few minutes dries up. You must look like a bloody mess: The bite-wound exposed and crusted, on the other side a pierced hand, pressed on your chest to numb the throbbing pain. The

face covered in dirt, mucus and sticky tears. The hair falling loosely all around your face, full of dust, dried mud and blood. The clothes, ripped and soiled exposing your severed skin.

You sit, motionless, all hope lost somewhere on the way. How did you end up like this, beaten and bruised, frozen to the bone, doomed and punished for a crime you didn't know you've even committed? Your executioner shows no mercy, on the contrary, he enjoys toying with his victim before the deed, how much would he put you through until he is satisfied?

In a moment of clarity, a word forms in front of your vision, horrible and calming at the same time.

## ***Suicide***

You could end yourself, preventing the clown from drawing any more pleasure from playing with you. There are enough shards sharp enough to slice your wrists with, it would be so quick, so easy to do...But you know he also saw it, even from the distance, even in his physical absence. A thud in your head tells you, a reminder of the brutal reality of your situation, tells you something without words:

*“You can think about it, but don't think I'll let it happen.”*

As the stone-faced girl that you are, your expression doesn't change when the tears run quietly down your cheek.

## 9. Negligence

### Notes for the Chapter:

Hiya guys! Hope you are in the mood for some extra mind games! C:

Thank you all for taking the time to write comments, you can't imagine how excited I am to read each and every one of them! Let's have a wonderful, shit-what-did-I-even-read-kind-of experience together! Hope y'all enjoy it!

The cold was unbearable. It kept on creeping under the remains of your clothes, chilling your body to a near-death and making you shiver. The shivers made your broken bones ache. You hoped for a hypothermia, but Pennywise took care of that. After a half-awaken slumber you found a dirty, thick woolen blanket next to you, a note pinned on it: "Sleep tight." What a joke that was. But you complied, partly because of your survival instincts, partly because you suspected he wouldn't hesitate to assist you if you didn't. Then came the thirst. You started to cough up blood and saliva, went feverish and unconcentrated. He tried to take advantage of this fact, tried to overcome the mental barricades you built up, but instead of your body you concentrated all your energy on your resisting mind, weakening dangerously. Perforced, he disappeared and came back, putting a bottle of water in front of you. You thought of refusal, but before you could even say no, he sneered: "It would be a shame to have to force you, little doll. For you, that is. It would be my very pleasure.". You drank, detached. After a while you gave up to care. It hurt too much to care. He came and went, but he didn't bring live victims with him again. Just their remains and sometimes food or water for you, greeting you with a mocking "Honey, I'm home.". Almost gentle he rises the parts he didn't devour into the air making them float in the swirl with the others. Then he takes his station, back on the pipe, back to the staring.

"Found anything good?"

you ask him sarcastically, after an especially long period of silence. You keep your eyes fixed on your wounded elbow and pierced hand.

He sounds almost like he's pouting when he replies.

"Good, maybe, but nothing useful."

You adjust your position, kneeling for a bit to relieve your sore butt.

"You seem to enjoy a little torture.", his voice sounds nearer now, but you don't look up. "This could be long over and done with, if you wouldn't be that stubborn."

The crusts of blood on your bite wounds are cracked, you notice. They don't look infected and they don't ache the excruciating way they did when the bite was fresh.

"You know what they say: A Lady has to keep her secrets."

You know that it sounds outrageously daring, you want it to be. Maybe his backlash blow will give you the heart attack you want so much, and what is a bit more pain in the equation anyway. You're surprised it doesn't come, so you look up to see him sitting cross-legged in front of you, shaking with suppressed laughter.

"O-ho-ho, such a sassy answer. After being here so long, I expected you'd be less impudent."

You chew on your reply, believing it was better for you to just wait. He tilts his head, curiously sniffing. He seems completely relaxed, inhaling deeply, but why shouldn't he be, he has more strength and power than you even if you wouldn't be in this injured, broken state.

"You're not scared at all right now? That's interesting."

"Well, when life gives you lemons."

Please, just please let him make a careless move, just enough to end this. You're dead tired, physically on the edge of what you're able to take and mentally worn out. Maybe, you thought, giving up really was for the better. Maybe, this time, he would make it quick, not out of mercy but out of excitement to finally get his way.

But it seems like he didn't hear your remark. With slightly puckered brows he continues to sniff, one of his eyes drifts away to the side, almost into his head. Absently-minded you sigh heavily, the cracking

of your almost broken ribs sends out fresh waves of pain into your body. The sudden impact catches you off-guard, stopping your breath all together and making you lose coordination as the muscles tense from the shock. You nearly faint from the anguish, falling over, but gloved hands and a silk-covered torso catch you. His grip is not hard, but almost caring. The instant urge to jolt back dissolves, you're unable to move, surprised by the sudden, gentle touch. You can't see his face but you hear his breath, growing faster. Sensing the danger, you try to sort your thoughts, but you can't get a grip on them.

Fuck.

You lost the control, your head is heavier than ever before, as the clown takes his chance and hastily flips through your memories with no shield of protection, holding you in his arms like a baby. You manage to stutter, panic-stricken, a pathetic attempt to resist or to stop him.

"N... No, you can't...". But he just pushes you deeper into his silky chest, growling frenzied at you.

***"Shut up and let me see."***

This can't be happening, how could you be so stupid? You can't see or feel a thing except panic, as if the clown closed the door to your soul, with him inside, and you on the outside. You try to form an order for your body to resist, to push yourself away from him and break off his connection to you, but he doesn't let you materialize the thought. He inhales and brushes your feeble efforts aside with his invisible hand, pressing you to himself as if he needed to hold onto you like a lifebuoy.

Then, out of nowhere, he jerks slightly, followed by a long exhale, you feel the hot moist air on your hair and neck. His breath slows down to a calm rhythm, he loosens his grip of you slightly as he slowly pushes you back onto your knees. You are terrified to see his expression. You were shut out from your own mind, not knowing what he saw. His hands rest on your shaking shoulders, stabilizing you while keeping you at distance. Your eyes try to avoid looking at him, but in the end, they find his face.

Confused doesn't even merely describe how he looks like. His eyes are wide-open, staring baffled into nothing, his lips moving to a

mumble directed at himself, inaudible to you. The silence returns, but it's filled with suspense, as you have to wait for Pennywise to come to a conclusion. The pain returned too, in absence of the absurd tenderness of his former embrace, but it doesn't affect you while you focus on him. He's processing what he found out, whatever that was, but it will decide what happens to you next.

His eyes are gradually aligning, meeting yours, the color still gold, still glowing, but they're missing the thread they contained before. It contains something new. Excitement.

"My, my...", he breaks the stillness, his words soft like butter, "I see."

His cryptic talk sets your nerves on fire and makes your blood rush through your veins. A decision was made.

## 10. Ambiguity

### Notes for the Chapter:

Hope you'll enjoy this chapter! C:

Just wanted to note: Sorry for all the german monster-texts in the recent commentaries! :D We'll restrict ourselves, but it was just too tempting to converse in native language!

Trigger warning: This chapter contains Non-Con! If you are triggered by exploitation and non-con elements, please be aware you might not want to read further!

You live, for now. Something in the atmosphere around Pennywise changed, neither for better or worse. For all you knew, it seemed like right now you weren't on the death row anymore, still he made no move to release you. Instead, he exchanged his viewing post, abandoning the pipe on the wall, now sitting right next to you, smiling constantly like he is thinking of a funny story.

The uncertainty of his discovery kills you, since he decided to keep silent about what he saw to, your vulnerability preventing you from daring to ask. You crave the feeling of something that wasn't intended to hurt. You hated it that you longed for the feeling of contact, a feeling you had for a second when he embraced you. As unspeakable as it was, a small part of you felt comforted. Sure, he didn't intend this gesture to be compassionate, it was just a tool to keep you from resisting him, but that wasn't really the point. Without anything to hold on, not even the control over yourself or your most hidden memories, the monster next to you was the only being to prove you still felt something – as horrible as these feelings might be. And yet, he was also the cause. Fatigued, your upper body sways lightly. He notices, chuckling quietly.

“Better get a good night's sleep. The fun just started, Love.”

You have no energy left to say something in return, but you hesitate, the grim expression of what's left of your fighting spirit. You're still



fraught with the danger of sleeping while he is close. His hand appears out of nothing, pushing your head gently to the ground, onto his stretched-out legs. His cooing voice erases your train of thought.

“Aw, so doubtful. I won’t bite, pinky promise.”

The last two words are filled with a joking chirp. Wrapped in the dirty, smelling blanket, your lids close as the heat of his leg transfers to your cheek, burning your skin.

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You wake up alone, the woolen cover tightly tucked around you. You slept deeply, no dreams disturbed you in getting a piece of your energy back. It’s an odd feeling to have some muscles almost relaxed, to really have a clear head to your own. You remain still, not yet willing to move. Pennywise kept his promise: There are no fresh wounds. He gave it back to you, the control, the access to your mind, but he left marks, you realize it instantly. There are things you know are there, memories, things you did or felt or observed, but you can’t concentrate on them, like he locked them up in a safe with the only key in his hand. The strength you got from your rest drove you to think, hard. Why can’t you remember? Why did he blur them out? You try again, and again, to think straight, to hold a memory tightly in your head and to see, but you can’t.

“Found anything good?”

The sarcasm in his question was cruel. It came from behind you, so you turn, where he’s lying on his back, playing with a rainbow slinky with childish joy. The bloody stains on his collar seem fresh, shimmering wet in the dim lights of the glass dome above. You ask yourself if he just appeared, or you have blended him out the whole time.

“Well...?”

You sit up, the woolen sheet slipping of your shoulder.

“What did you do to me?”

The color of your tone is surprisingly threatening, though still rough. The last sip of water seems eons ago. You aren't scared but confused and angry, in need for straight answers.

He doesn't reply, just continues to flip the toy from one of his hands to the other, smirking a knowing smile. The rhythmic rattle of plaything sounds like a ticking clock. You wait, silently. He has you at his will, that's the only thing you know for sure. Standing on no even grounds anymore, you have to play by his rules now. At least until you have a plan.

“I keep things I enjoy and I play with it, little doll.”

You knew that already, but you don't say anything. If you want answers, it's best to let him do the talking.

He throws the slinky away, bored, and crawls to you, his movements stunningly unnatural. You see the ice in him again, not sure if this was a good or a bad sign. He creeps up from your legs like an insect, pushing his tall body over yours, forcing you to bend back, taken by surprise. You're caged under his figure, but you don't feel the reflex to flee. It's enchanting, his irises have the color of purified water, crashing with his fiery orange hair, the red make-up that colors not only his lips in bright red but cuts over his cheeks up over his eyes, an over exaggerated fake smile. You want to get away from him, but your body is acting weirdly slow and almost... offering.

“And, oh, what an interesting toy you can become. But I want to play with your current state a bit longer.”

The usual smell of burned sugar, dust and rot that surrounded him until now has left him, you realize shocked, it's like he transpires pure ecstasy. He lowers himself, placing his nose to your throat, the contact makes you want to throw up. This is true horror, your mind is going crazy: He reversed it. This time, you're caged inside your head, but your body is not under your will anymore. He is.

No. No, you can't do this, he can't do this, you can't take this. You scream and fight inside to move, to turn.

But you can only think with fear and fury, and watch in terror how he draws in your scent, his tongue slipping out to taste the cold sweat on your collarbone. He pushes his arms under your limpened body and lifts you up at your waist, sitting himself up with you on top of him like he's the ventriloquist and you're the wooden puppet. Your arms hanging loosely, your face untensed and lacking of the emotions you want it to express. Now you really do fear HIM, not Jack Wade, not yourself, not anything but him, what he'll do to you. You really are his doll now.

Pennywise laughs, loud and devilish, taking your arms and swings them playfully while he starts to sing, his voice high and goofy.

***“Jack and Jill fight down a hill***

***Above the salty water***

***Jack falls down and breaks his crown***

***and Jill's without a slaughter.”***

He pushes long, spikey claws into the skin around the wrists, growing them out of ripping white gloves, scratching it without breaking in.

“What a pity, Jill couldn't take a bite before Jacky flew away. Did he *smell* good, little doll?”

You're scared, out of your mind with fear. His taunting rhyme made no sense at all, he was truly insane, almost as insane as you. His now glowing golden eyes wander to your neckline, drool drips from his open smirk.

“Did he smell as good as *you* do right now? A ripe, wonderfully dressed meal, ready to be savored?”

Your eyes are beaming with wordless plea as he lets your arms go loose again, placing one of his blackened, clawed hands on your back

to hold you upright, rasping over the thin, ripped fabric of your blouse and scraping off bits of dried blood. The other hand is pinching your chin to set your face up before his own, his burning gaze is travelling through your sockets and meets you inside your head, overflowing with amused derision. You try to tell him you hate him, that he disgusts you, that what he's doing to you is beyond the limits of what you are able to bear.

His expression changes into a grimace of sarcastic pity.

“How I want to get a taste of you, I want to relish your flesh so much and yet, you don't let me. Poor me, you are too cruel to your friend Pennywise.”

Without a warning sign, he pushes his lips onto yours. They feel cold and hard, wet with his drool as they shove your mouth open. You squirm when his tongue slicks over the insides of your mouth, back down your throat, but the feeling isn't conveyed to your nerves to act out on it. You want to cry, the despair of being used like this without a chance to fight back is pushing your insides. His tongue seems never-ending, growing, rushing over every piece of skin it can find. It feels like it's suffocating you, playing with your numbed tongue. His deep chuckle fuels your rage as well as your fright. It tastes like poison, his saliva thick and bitter and burning. His breath is fast and hard against your face, his eyes not leaving yours, not allowing you to close them to reduce the intensity of his torture. He enjoys seeing you completely paralyzed, physically defenseless against his will while you run berserk in your mind to get the control back.

When he finally releases you, your mouth feels like an open wound. His face is dripping wet, his and your spit mixed together. You're huffing. As the feeling in your body returns the shaking comes back, too. You feel like the pathetic travesty of a human.

“Maybe next time I'll tell you what I found out about this little doll of mine. If you're nice enough, you'll maybe even get a balloon.”

Your tears don't come quietly this time. The abuse you experienced until now was nothing compared to what you feel in this moment. He turns his back at you, the smile widening as he listens to your weeping cries that almost sound like laughter over your forcibly

stolen, first kiss.

## 11. Insidiousness

### Notes for the Chapter:

Happy Halloween, you Guys!

What better day to spend it with our favorite clown?

C: I really admire you all for following this! Makes me float ;D

Have an awesome, spooky, crazy Fright-Day!

You feel like you've been torn apart, not in two, but countless pieces. And before you can collect the broken pieces to fix them, the next slice of the knife was already coming. He was unpredictable. You are terrified of how he could manipulate you – body AND mind – more even of the potential this demonstration his power holds. He could be calm, angry, manic, cruel and happy, in a flinch of an eye changing before you, in shape, mood and manner. You knew that you were jailed by something far different from a human, still – how could you even prepare yourself to fight back against the ever-changing unknown?

He didn't attack you again, pleased by how well he played you, he just sat next to you with his back turned to you, and then disappeared in the dark. It makes you feel better to know that you have a physical moment of soleness, with no one to feed on your fear and despair. You spend your time alone by sitting, your arms wrapped around your pulled-up legs, watching your predecessors swirl around you. You see Luke's remains a few times, his floating hand on the slaughtered body moves as if he would wave to you. The limbs and body parts you see are pale white, drained from their fluids, in different states of decay. You don't mind the smell anymore. They hypnotize you, seeing how they dance in the sparkled, dusty light. Are you going to join them, soon?

You haven't cried after the last outbreak. The tears just stopped to flow, you feel parched. Just like your smile, your tears disappeared, never to return. You tried to process what happened, but the diverse violence in this farce of a kiss left you mortified.

There was never the feeling of a need for being intimate with

someone, or lust itself. Of course, you cherished the moments of gentle hugs or caring kisses from your grandma or your friends. But they had a completely different nature, a vibe of safety, of appreciation rather than arousal. As a teen, it worried you, being and staying a virgin wasn't normal, but you quickly decided it was for the better. It was just another part of you, a part that was content with just yourself. You were your own treasure. It seemed like you were radiating an aura of this conclusion, because no boys or girls made attempts to hit on you, and you were glad about it. Jack Wade was the first to try crossing this invisible line. But with him, you had at least a fighting chance.

You long for your home, your bed, your shelter, just anything that could make you feel safe. No wonder your grandparents moved away, Derry was cursed, just like Scotland, just like any place in this rotten world. Either this - Or you were...

The thought hurts like a sting, a memory wants to materialize, but it can't. Your head feels like a radio in search for the right frequency without finding it.

**“DAMN IT, DAMN IT, DAMN IT!”**

A few pieces of trash fall off the pile as you punch into the ground. Crumbling, just like yourself. The noise is beautifully cutting through the silence. You sit and stare to the ground, flaming anger in your guts and chilling hopelessness in your chest. You have the urge to destroy Pennywise's tower, stomping your way down and out, but you withstand it. Not because of Pennywise's inevitable punishment that would follow, but because it wouldn't change anything. This was a place where souls get lost and don't find their way out again.

“Behave, little doll.”

Half of his face appears, rising from the edge of the platform. His red painted nose is twitching, inducing that he is smiling his usual, snide smile.

“I could change my mind on giving you a gift.”

You can't suppress a scornful snort. A warning rattling sound emerges from him, but his eyes barely change their sapphire tint.

“Don't push your luck.”, he says as he pushes himself up the edge, smooth and effortless, in his hand a green clump you recognize immediately. Your cardigan with the carousel horse pin. He went to your house. You stare at his hand, quickly thinking, asking yourself what he is planning. Pennywise walks slowly towards you, stopping just inches away from you and dangling the garment in front of your nose.

“You *want it* ?”

You eye him, careful and tense. His face is a riddle, smiling, emitting harmlessness, but he taught you well enough not to trust him, so you nod, but you keep your position, refusing to move.

“I can't hear you.” His chirping mock knots your intestines together. *Right*, you calm yourself, you knew that *for every hint of a carrot, there'd be a stick*. You shake with reluctance while finding your voice. You had to make a decision, again. Getting crumbled by his hands or plan to rise up from ash and dust. You won't let him break you, again.

“Yes, I do.”

He laughs gleefully and grabs your injured right hand, pulling you up onto your feet. Your weakened body stands, but your legs feel like they could give in any second. He lets you stand there, battered and shaking, watching you with childish amusement.

“What a surprisingly obedient girl you can be if you want to.”, he grins as he wraps the soft, warm cashmere around your shoulders. The sudden warmth of the wool covers your skin in goosebumps. It smells like home, like fresh air, cinnamon and sugary dough. He inspects you, head to toe, arms crossed.

“Green sure suits you. Seems like a *natural* match.”

His eyes sparkle with taunt, as if he just told you an inside joke you



didn't know the punchline of. He doesn't seem angry about your perplexity but rather... whimsical. You try to decide what to do now, unsure of what he'd expect from you, but he answers the unspoken question for you. With a quick motion he sweeps you up in his arms, your muscles stiffening from the sudden release of your weight. You just get to let out a surprised huffing sound before your head is pressed against his pompous white collar, blocking your sight. Your heart starts racing again, pumping wearied against your ribcage while you hastily build up the walls around what's left of your mind.

"Since you're not thanking me like a good girl would, I will repay myself."

You can't see anything; your vision is covered with silk and cotton fluffs of cloth. You try to push yourself away, not nearly ready for another tormenting experience, but his grip is like an iron claw.

"**Behave,**", he warns you again, the word full of danger that makes your heart sink in forlornness. You stop moving instantly, "You get my gift, I get your smell. Tit for tat."

He moves a while, god knows where to, then sits himself down, his back leaning against something to make you curl in his lap. The small draft of the swirl of orbiting corpses you got used to is gone, there's just the burning heat of his body, paired with a buzzing sound so unfamiliar you're sure you've never heard something like it before. You feel his fingers in your hair, your shoulders tightening to prepare for a sudden strike. But they're just brushing strands of hair back, exposing your neck. His heavy breath is moist against the thin skin behind your ears, you suddenly are aware of how close his face has to be to yours as thick drops of drool fall on it and run down to your spine. His chest moves slowly, rocking your head and upper body in a calm rhythm. Your hands are stuck between his body and yours, feeling the smoothness of the thick layers of his costume but unable to identify a body underneath, if there even is one.

Against your concern and all that is good, something coming from deep inside you orders you to relax, even to press yourself closer to the cradle. It's dictating your thoughts, reasoning with your doubtful conscience: You can't afford to fight this moment of not getting hurt or your fear telling you that the clown is your incarnated death

sentence. You desperately need this truce, you need to be hold and the illusion of protection. When you press yourself into him, Pennywise's chest stops moving for a second, holding his breath. But he returns quickly to his deep inhales, quietly disturbed by an occasional snicker. You don't care that he is laughing at you, your instinct - or whatever it was that came out from the inside - tells you it's the right thing to do: If you want to stay sane and preserve your energy, you have to detach and accept. *Rise from the ashes in which you have to crawl – for now.* You feel slumber coming, powerful and fast. For this moment, you force yourself to forget where you are and who is holding you, just feeling the nuzzle of a tall, strong body and smelling the sugary cinnamon of a fuzzy cashmere relict. You draw as much air in as your damaged lungs allow you to, exhaling every string of your qualms out with a breath.

## 12. Tempest

### Notes for the Chapter:

Okay, folks. I'm really REALLY nervous about this one. Please be kind with me.

Also, I am currently struggling with daily uploads. Life is busy and the last few days I felt kind of stuck - as this progresses, writing takes measurable more time (researching and proof-reading). Since I don't want to disappoint anyone who is awesome and kind enough to read this story, I may have to skip a day or two.

Trigger Warning: Please note that this chapter contains Rape/Non-Con elements. If you are sensitive about these elements, please skip this chapter!

*"We have to kill it. It's a monster."*

*"Are you going crazy? She's just a baby."*

*"Your father told me everything. I can't let that thing live."*

*"That's just stupid superstition of an aging, crazy man!"*

*"You should have told me! This is madness!"*

*"They're rumors, for god's sake, a stupid family legend. She's our child!"*

*"That thing is not a child of mine."*

*Burning. The heat is melting the contours of the room. A woman, screaming. Smoke. Fear. A shot.*

*Silence*

*You see without eyes, feel without a body.  
Pennywise stands at your side, forcing you to see while blending into the flames.*

*There are shadows, cutting through the flames. A calm voice.*

*“It’s okay now. Don’t cry. I’m here.”*

*The fire shifts, revealing a small, emerald gloom.*

*“I’m not afraid. You can turn, now. I’ll protect you.”*

You open your eyes. You’re not on top of the tower anymore. It’s a small wooden room, old and moldered. It’s illuminated, but there is no source of the light, no candle, no lamps. Dulled amber like a dying fire pit. You hear the faint sound of heavy rain.

“What was that?”

“Let’s call it goodwill.”

His mocking voice echoes in your ear, loud and near. You remember the move, the curl, his cradle. Your body is warm, but your heart feels cold as ice. You’ve recognized the voices the moment you heard them. Your parents, your grandma. You’ve seen the fraction of a vision that looked like a long-forgotten memory, but you can’t see the context.

An impulse makes you jump up and back away from Pennywise. He lets you, contempt with following you with his eyes while your green cardigan softly slides down his lap. He’s sitting in the remains of

what was once a beautiful, velvet wingback armchair made of dark wood and grey ornamented, embroidered fabric. A throne, it's dark king resting in it, both arms on the carved rests.

There's so much anger in you, so much hate. You rise your chin, breathing heavy and flat. You feel the pain making room for a blind, raging feeling, something deep and saturated.

"I don't need good-will from something like you."

His posture doesn't change, but his aura turns darker.

"You showed me a lie. Take what you want, do what you want, I don't care. But don't fool me!"

His snorting chuckle deepens gradually as he pushes himself up to his full height.

*"But don't fool me!"*, he whines exaggerated, mimicking you. "Who's the one that *fools* you, stupid, little doll? I'm just joining the routine."

There is a thunder in the far. Your inner tremble spreads into your limbs, the confusion over what Pennywise does and say, his everchanging mannerisms drive you mad. You can feel you want to connect the pieces, to see the bigger picture, but your opposite shakes them around every time you get close to a solution. He starts to move, every step makes the moldy boards of the floor creak. His face is pure wildness, lips sharp and eyes glowing.

You want to back away, but force yourself to keep standing. Every fiber of your body is tense with fear, with the wish to run and not look back. You remain, standing. He can't eat your flesh, you have the power to deny him the ultimate satisfaction, whatever the reason. You have at least this trump to feed your strength with. He stops, looking down on you, his smile frozen in his grimace. The throbbing pulse behind your forehead is back, but you are able to withstand his force. No more bowing before him.

"Humans are really pitiful, don't you agree, my doll? So *weak*."

You didn't even see his hand coming before his fingers close around your throat.

*"So fragile."*

You could swear you hear your bones crunching, your body pumping with adrenaline, losing oxygen. Your confidence is crackling under the slow reaction of your body. His words cover the sharpness of the danger he emits. He's calm, chillingly calm.

"Detestably easy to kill. I'll make you see 'em, through my eyes."

Before you can scream, his free hand is already on your blouse, ripping it from your body. You scratch his face, but he doesn't even flinch as if your fingers never touched him. He just keeps on ripping, your bralette, your pants, rips them off your body while you try to fight back tooth and nail, terrorized by his cold, calm expression. But he's too big, too fast, too strong. Pennywise's outstretched arm pushes you back, upright against the wooden wall, exposing your bare skin like a picture in a frame. The only barrier left is your panty, the chill of your nudity making your skin prickle, every bump a cry that wants to break out of you. You toss and turn under him to find a way to escape, but he just presses himself onto you, pushing his thigh between your legs to open them. He doesn't smile anymore, focusing his golden gaze on your fluttering eyes.

"You wanted a fighting chance, ain't I generous for granting your wish?"

You growl in disgust, but his lips are faster on yours than your curse. He's yanking your head back with a sturdy grip in your hair, releasing your throat. The bitter taste of him returns to your mouth, furious poison on your pale lips. You try to bite his tongue that ravishes yours, but it's hard as stone. A heat sparkles in your stomach, with self-hatred you feel the arousal that dictates your movements. The kiss is as grimly fierce as the last one, but nothing compared to the feeling his other hand is setting off. His free hand wandered, from your back to your stomach into your panties. The rough fabric of his gloved fingers feels like a rasp as he is brushing them over your lips, through your frenzied dizziness you realize your body invites him, wetting the thin, stained fabric. With all of your might you grip his arm and try to push it away from going farther, shaken by your reaction. You're kidding yourself, you think, desperate. You're like clay in his hands, containing no resistance to the strength he bears.

You grasp as one of his sharpened fingers tears your last protecting barrier off. You wail, but that's all you can do before he pushes his finger inside you. Growing, changing, it slides relentlessly in and out of your tightening, pain-throbbing entrance. You explode with hatred, about your weakness, your inability to slash him off of you. The sensation of this twisting, pushing and pulling *thing* inside you and the pain and pleasure it releases is overwhelming, it buzzes through your body in shockwaves, making your walls contract even more. You need air, you need to pull away to breathe, but he sucks you dry, inhaling you.

His tongue leaves your mouth as if he heard your thoughts, only to search for your jaw, your chest, your breasts, leaving a trail of cold saliva, a shiny painting of horror. You saw his irises beaming with light, even coloring the white around them before they disappeared under his wild head of hair. The intense stare you saw for a second, the light in it, they push you over the edge, you scream and curse him, your voice cracking as you beat at his shoulders, his back, whatever part of him your fists can find.

When he pulls his finger out, you feel sore and swollen from the friction. Your hands fly everywhere, hitting Pennywise and the wall behind you to break free.

A sudden sting on your chest petrifies you through and through.

His head rises as his body backs away from you. You see his spiked mouth that scratched your breasts and notice with anxiety his heavy, growling breathing. Terror makes you stumble as you stagger away by what you see in his shifting eyes. He's not done with you.

He leaps at you like a wild animal, crashing into the wall behind you as you duck away. You kick him in his head before you jump onto your feet.

*"I'll strip it off."*, he growls, his voice buzzing and deepening, slowly righting himself. His whole body shakes. You run, your mind determined to find a handle to a door to freedom, to do anything to escape from him, when you hear a ripping sound. A sound of teared fabric. Silk.

You can't turn fast enough before you are lifted up into the air, clawed hands, too many hands to be normal – on your side, your head, your throat, your legs, lift you up.

**"STOP! NO, STOP!"**

He doesn't care. He makes you face him, his jaw is hanging low, the teeth sparkling with his drool in a red glimmer that shines from within his inside. There's no way you dare to look down to what may become your personal hell, you burn, a glowing white and red void is blinding you, rage and fear dancing in your head.

One last growl emerges his throat before you are pushed down.

You don't see it, you feel it. He's ripping you apart, ramming his length into you with no preparation, no mercy or control, thrusting frenzied by a drive so malicious that it could be the essence of evil itself. Something breaks out inside you, spreading like sparks, a feeling you know, a thing that was caged. He pulls himself out, ready for the next thrust, the next blow of the knife, but you are obliterated



as there's noise everywhere, a fizzing noise, bubbling up under your skin. Your head gives in, bursting under the pressure. You roar out in a pitch of a tone unknown to you, it feels like you are pulsating with a savage aura, venom in your veins, each pulse intended to kill him. He stops abruptly, time is standing still, the only things moving are the tiny specks of dust in the air, gently swirling down to the ground.

His breath is as heavy as yours, his teeth still pushed out of his jaw, but his eyes slowly turn into their normal shade. The hands that fetter you decrease, the remaining two are putting you softly on the ground. You can't feel anything, there's just emptiness left, a blank space erased of its contents. Pennywise struggles a long time to turn back into his clown self, pulling the teeth in one at a time. His panting is still deep and hoarse as he sits himself in front of your petrified self. He searches for your eyes, trying to bind his and yours together, his playful smile returning when they succeed. Somehow, he revives your dead gaze, drawing some life into you.

“That's the spirit, little doll.”

## 13. Restraint

### Notes for the Chapter:

Finally, a new chapter! Hope you enjoy a little bit more teasing in this one, the next chapter is in the works and almost ready to go!

Thank you all for tagging along, I really appreciate each and every one of you! <3

All boundaries are broken. You let him dress you in clothes you don't care to know whom they once have belonged to. They're lying thick and heavy on your skin, but you almost don't realize you wear them at all. You barely notice what happens around you. All you realize is that savage energy that possessed you when he came onto you. The fizzing sound left you, the pulse faded, but the feeling you have since this moment still stimulates your heart to pump with a strange force, like a drug.

There was no talking. After he finished putting you into clothes, Pennywise left again, leaving you on the floor, alone with your returning self-hatred, your grief, your fear and the leftovers of the unknown feeling. With his absence, reality crushes down on your head. You try to push what happened away, to forget, but it's hard. You struggle with the flashbacks that want to haunt you, fresh and hot in your head. You focus on breathing and on a thought that you want hold onto, the thought of surviving this, to get through.

After you feel calm enough, you stand up, looking around. It's the first time you really see where you are. The room is small, completely made from wooden planks, it looks like the inside of a crate. No handles. No doors. No windows.

On one of the walls there is a small dresser, completely disintegrated. Next to it a tall, clouded, spotted standing mirror. It catches your eye, without thinking, you approach it. In the growing reflection you can see yourself, your bare feet on the rough floor, strange, black pants that don't fit you right. Your gaze travels up, you see a plain, white shirt, red stains cover the side where the fabric is ripped off. Foreign blood on a foreign shirt. The bite wound, dark spots on your elbow,

looks distorted in the mirror, you take a glimpse at your arm. It didn't open again, which you notice you find surprising, but it rather seems to heal, the edges around the little wounds slightly raised and lightly pink. You turn to look at your other hand, feeling the roughness of the round, thick scab in the middle of your palm with your fingertips. It still hurts, but you can move most of your fingers to full extend. There is a creaking noise behind you, your hair on your back raises, but you suppress a flinch. You turn back to the mirror. Your face is framed by wild, ruffled hair, it looks greasy and dry at the same time. You stare into your own eyes, seeing little cuts and dirt on your face that lost the liveliness it once had, and right next to your face, is...

"Honey, I'm home."

Pennywise laughs at his habitual mock. He is standing in the corner of the room that's the farthest away from you. His voice triggers the memories of his hands on your body, his mouth on yours, the feeling you had when he violated you, the sudden flash of powerful ecstasy. But you can't define it or sort it. The cruelty of his greeting, especially after what he did to you, sets off your fear for him again, working its way through you as you smell the rusty odor of drying blood.

"Such a lucky girl.", he says, still in the corner, watching you in the mirror. "I usually don't have to contain myself like that."

You freeze as you understand his words. Contain. So, he showed... composure? You can't face him directly, you just look at him through the looking glass, afraid to be turned into stone if you do.

"You smelled so tasty, tasty, tasty..."

He eyes you, hungry and curious, with an impish grin, as if he is waiting for you to react so he can attack again. The expression you see on your mirrored face looks disgusted, but also guilty. You realize the extent of guilt that you contain, guilt over what you let him do to you, what you felt when... No, no, you have to push it away, back into oblivion.

You want to cry so hard, to release the growing anxiety, but there are

no tears. Your teeth grind, retaining your screams. Push them away.

“Just kill me already.”

You can't overthink what you say. What could he do to you that was worse than this? You turn, first your head, then the rest, stand without a proper spine, without ways to choose from. He took it from you, without compensation. Your decisions are not important anymore, he is a puppeteer that pulls your strings whether you choose to move right or left. He raises his eyebrows in amusement.

“Where would be the *fun* in that, little doll?”

“You've had your fun. Why can't you end this once and for all?”

His manic laughter cuts through the silence of the room, he is shaking, rocking as he giggles.

“I *can't*? Ohhh, what a human way to talk, Love. You know I most certainly *can*. But I *choose* not to. Decisions, decisions...”

His grin is wider than ever, full of himself, you notice sickened.

“I want to know WHY!” It's a shout, filled with your desperation, so loud that it shocks you the moment you said it. You're close to just jump in his face and punch until nothing is left of that smirk, to kill him with your own, bare hands, to torture him, your head gets hot and busy like a steam-powered machine.

“One step at a time, little doll.”

He doesn't move. His voice isn't angry, but calm. His expression doesn't change, except for a notion of satisfaction that glimmered in his amber eyes. You know there's no use, that you can do nothing right. Because you are just a weak, beaten, human girl, and he isn't. Your words don't matter, your actions don't matter. You sigh, unsaid begs to just drop dead on the spot flowing out of you with it. He tilts his head again, watching you like a child watches it's favorite TV Show.

"Come here."

The purr in his voice can't shade his direct order, his outstretched arm with the wiggling hand showing you the direction. You shake with fury, holding the movements in you so dearly want to do but know you can't perform. Your hands around his throat. Your knee in his crotch. Your fists in his stomach. Your fingers digging these god-damned glowing eyes out of his face, your teeth in...

You gasp.

***These visions.***

Such a familiarity, yet so strange. It strikes you like lightning, your stomach boils up so sudden that you cringe, the heatwave bubbling up into your throat burns so hot you almost fold in half. You whine, completely confused and pained. Your head swirls with blurry images, a face full of excitement, eyes filled with fear, an olive trench coat, a desire that arises in your chest, your itching gums, the smell of salt...

"Come."

His tone is more persuasive now, he fixates on your face. Without thinking you take the few steps towards him through the room. He takes in liters of breath as you waver in his direction, smiling like a madman. You feel like you're melting from the inside, your arms are tightly wrapped around your torso, pressing as if it would relief you.

"Playtime's over."

Pennywise puts his arms around you, the touch kickstarts your fear

into the highest possible gear. The broiling fades as fast as it started, your breath cools down by the frosty angst you feel from the contact with him. Another riddle, another thousand questions that occupy your mind to weigh you down. You jerk away from his hug, and he lets you. Not entirely, but far enough you can look up to him. He looks down at you, smiling with contempt.

“You don’t wanna stay? You want to go back up on the pile?”

, he asks with false worry and a fake pout, his twinkling eyes giving him away. You don’t answer him. He won’t kill you. You can’t do it yourself either. But he will torture you, because of reasons you don’t know, yet. Maybe you never will. There’s nothing you could lose that hasn’t already been taken. To pretend that you really had a choice, it was hilariously cruel. In here or out there, nothing can change the bare essential fact that he will always be there. You don’t reply, instead you close your eyes so you don’t have to see his sneering grin anymore, and let him take you back in his self-centered embrace, filling your head with the only happy thought: Survive, get through this.

“That’s my girl.”, he says before he breaks into laughter again, his shaking body summoning a few tears back behind your itching lids.

## 14. Perception

### Notes for the Chapter:

YOU GUYS! You are truly amazing! It's so fun to read your comments and replying to them.

I'm struggling with sickness since a few days, I has really put me off. But! I have the new chapter ready!

I do hope this little down will be over soon so that I can use my free time (next to University and work) to finalize the next chapter! Seeing all the kindness, may it be a comment, new Kudos or new Subscribers/bookmarks - This is what makes my heart skip a beat! <3 Okay, enough blabbering!

Hope you enjoy! C:

You couldn't sleep, back on his lap, back on the throne. When he sat back again on the armchair with you, he returned to the drooling and breathing. He was using you for whatever cause, resembling a child that was using a stuffed animal to power up while napping, clenching onto your body, occasionally growling or scoffing. The buzzing from inside his chest filled your ears and made it easier to space out. It felt like you have separated your thoughts from your head, a shell without its content in his arms, your mind flying around you without the opportunity to re-enter.

Your stomach growls after some time. You pray he wouldn't notice, but his giggle implies that he did.

"Hungry, little doll? I know the feeling.", he taunts as he puts you carelessly onto the upholstery after standing up. He turns and walks to the empty wall, pushing it open and revealing the exit: A hatch. The whole wall is a hatch. That's why you didn't find a handle when you panicky searched for a door, you realized. He slips through the small slit, pushing the wall back up and locking you in again. You wait a few heartbeats, then you get up. What would you give to feel normal again, to move without tiptoeing around in fear of when Pennywise would come back. There's an urge to move your tired, stiff muscles, so you turn to the little dresser to inspect it. It's a fragile looking piece, made from a similar dark wood as the armchair. It's

legs and drawers were once crested with white elegant patterns, but the paint mostly chipped off long ago, leaving a ghost of its former craftsmanship. You don't dare to open the drawers, since it looks like they would fall apart when touched. Your glance falls on the floor, seeing the remains of what once were your clothes, a mess of electric blue, white and burgundy pieces.

You force yourself to close your eyes, breathing in and out to stop your mind from remembering. You return to the chair, crawling onto it. You notice now how unusually big it is, but then again, so is its owner. There's almost a comforting scratch as you press your cheek against the warm, rugged cushions. You ask yourself how long you are already being captured, but there is no way to measure time down here. And who would miss you anyway? You've made no friends since your move, completely cutting ties to the ones you left overseas. Maybe work would call, angry that you don't pick up the phone and do the work. But you're in trial period, completely new and barely integrated, so they'll likely just drop you, no further questions asked.

It somehow makes you sad of how disposable you have become to the world. Although you never had strong bonds with people, you wanted to belong, and they let you. After your grandpa died, Granny followed shortly after, leaving you without the only person you truly loved and who truly loved you. But wasn't that the point, in the end? That you were *allowed* to belong to them, not *invited*? Sudden shivers run down your spine, as you realize the impact of understanding. Was it that you started losing the connection to the world, or was it that you've never had one to begin with?

The wall moves again, disturbing your train of thought. You see the dusty, grey light from the outside stretching into the room. Pennywise slips in again, fast and effortless, a small bag pack in his hand. He throws it on the ground, the half-zipped bag spilling out its contents over the dirty floor. Pencils, small textbooks, a lunch box and a matching thermos, pictures of Spiderman on them. A kid's bag. You don't look at him, just stand up quickly, for this is his throne in his kingdom, you a mere slave. He passes you and sits down, without a word, just observing. His face is unmoved, unaltered by an expression. It takes just a few steps to get to the lunchbox. It's heavy,



filled with three pressed, untouched sandwiches, grapes and candy bars. A box packed by a loving mother, you think, guilt pinching your guts, a mother who will not get her child back again. Is it already floating, dancing with Luke and Lily?

Mechanically, you sit down and start to eat without really tasting. Out of the corners of your eyes, you see Pennywise watching you. A master and his dog, a voice inside you whispers devilish. You chew and swallow, chew and swallow. You put the now empty lunchbox back into the bag, your hands slightly shaking from the faceless image of a kid, maybe chubby and a bit nerdy, rosy cheeks full of life that are now drained of their color. You empty the thermos with what feels like a single gulp, cool coke running down your grazed throat.

“You don’t make eating look like it’s a pleasure.”

You close your eyes, preparing for the next round of humiliation and mockery.

“Pleasure is something reserved for the free, not the captured.”

Pennywise’s mouth twitches but he doesn’t laugh out loud like you expected him to. You put everything back into the bag. You suspect that the life of this kid would’ve been taken by him even if he wouldn’t have to feed you. Still, you feel the weight of a life holding onto your heart. The least you could do was to treat what belonged to it with respect.

“Well then, do you want to be free?”

Your heart skips painfully, puzzled by his calm voice and his question. Your face turns to him, his trancing glare. You hesitate, this definitely has to be a trick question. He just sits on his chair with criss-crossed legs and stares with this odd curiosity.

“Well,” you start with nervous prudence, turning his question into your own, “who would want to be captured?”

“Hah. That’s a **good** question, little doll. Yes, **who** would want **that**?”

His grin widens unnaturally, making him look like a classical painting of a hellish creature before sealing a pact. Your hand on the bag clenches into the shiny stiff fabric. Was he implying that you were here on your free will?

“What are you...”

He was on his feet so fast you couldn’t see him move. You made a mistake by eating, your turning stomach is working against you, sour spit gathers in your mouth.

“Your freedom. I could give it to you.”

You are stunned, frozen in fear and bewilderment. Unintentionally you start to stutter, your mind and heart working faster than your mouth.

“Y-You’re going... going to let me ... g-go?”

“Better.”

How did he come so close to you? You're scared to death. For every carrot, there's a stick. He's the master, you're the dog. He doesn't mean it, he can't mean it. He bends down in front of you, slowly, calculated, never blinking while looking into your wide-open eyes. His hands flow from the top of your head over your cheeks, dazzling your mind. You don't know what to think first or last, he's got you running after a swirling storm of thoughts. They find their purpose on your throat, when he opens his lips to reveal his razor fangs.

“I'll make you want to stay.”

Your head explodes with weight, his hands on your throat reeling you forcefully into the ground. You don't fall, you are pulled down into darkness, your hands on his gloves unsure to hold onto them or getting them off of you.

*The world looks rough, like an old black-and-white photograph, the colors barely saturated. You're not in the crate anymore, but at a school. You feel a firm grip on your neck and the back of your head. Entranced you look up to see him, Pennywise the dancing clown, looking down at you with a mask of a face. You're alarmed, but he pushes your head back down, guiding your view to a small wall in front of the schoolground.*

*A bell rings, there are people and kids everywhere. A little girl looks up to an older woman, standing a little aback from the commotion, holding her grandchild's hand in a caressing grip. The girl is delicate, a beautiful, cute face that begs to be loved, with big doll-like eyes.*

“Granny, do I really have to go there?”

*The old woman smiles, every wrinkle around her mouth like a frame*

*around a warm colored picture.*

*"I think you have to, honey. Don't you want to become smart?"*

*"But... There are so **much** of them."*

*The little girl presses her face into the thick, brown skirt of her grandma, shaking slightly.*

*"This will soon pass, it's the first day of school for all of these kids, something new and excited. Aren't you nervous and excited, too?"*

*Her free hand drops lightly on the top of the girl's hair, anchoring her.*

*"It's not excitement...", she whispers hoarsely, the small face full of worry.*

*The crowd's noises sound like they are muted as the old woman sighs.*

*"Oh, my sweet girl. I know. But it won't be for long, then there will be happiness and joy. You just have to work hard for it, remember, and be strong. You'll always have two choices of what to do, go in and be brave or hide and be miserable. Your decision, that's all that matters."*

*The child stares up to her grandmother, taking in her encouragement and assurance. Her small trembling hand pushes the fingers of the old woman lightly one last time before letting go.*

*"I'll go."*

*"That's my girl. I love you, honey."*

*"I love you too, granny."*

*She helps her put a small bag pack on, then she brushes her thin, boney fingers through the little girl's hair as she takes her timid steps into the school. Her soft, warm voice echoes into the oncoming returning darkness.*

*"You'll do good, honey. Do it for me."*

The dusty floor is back again under your feet. His hands are still on your throat, but they lie on it more than they push. Without acknowledging it, your hands grip tightly onto his chest, holding you upright. You stare blankly on the red pon-pons of his costume, trying

to make a sense of what you have just seen. You recognized every bit of it, this couldn't have been an illusion of him. You remember your first day of school, the faces of the kids, the smile of your grandma, the feeling of her best brown cotton skirt. But there was a new memory that you had long decided to forget, reviving as you relived it. You remember the smells. So many smells, not comparable to something else, unique and ambrosial, steaming and heavy. The recollection of them makes your sour mouth hot.

His humming snicker makes you look at his face, the usual sly grin on him. You're wondering if it will ever be of another nature than menacing. His brows are raised, as if he expects you to speak.

"I... I don't know, what was that supposed to do?"

"Stripping another layer off."

He rolls the words on his tongue, his lips overflowing with drool, wet as if he would savor each of them as a glorious feast.

### **Author's Note:**

Thank you for reading till the end! I would be happy for a comment, constructive criticism is always welcome, especially since I'm not a native speaker!